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Answer given by Mr Várhelyi
on behalf of the European Commission
(21.8.2026)

The Commission recognises that animal welfare is an important component of sustainable food systems. It also recalls that the EU-Mercosur Interim Trade Agreement (ITA) does not lower EU rules and preserves each Party's right to regulate, including in areas linked to food safety, animal health and animal welfare. The ITA, which has been provisionally applied between the EU and the Mercosur Signatory Parties since 1 May 2026, also provides for cooperation and dialogue on animal welfare with Mercosur partners.

Current EU legislation on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter applies to imports. However, the same principle does not currently apply to EU rules on the welfare of animals at farm.

Over the last two years, welfare of animals at slaughter has been checked during audits conducted in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. Although not all audit reports are published yet, the outcomes of such checks were satisfactory.

As announced in the Livestock Strategy¹ of 7 July 2026, the Commission intends to propose by the end of 2026 a targeted revision of animal welfare rules for laying hens and broilers, and in 2027, a similar proposal aims to address pig welfare. These proposals aim to follow-up on the Citizens' Initiative 'End the cage age' and also aim to provide an opportunity to introduce equivalent animal welfare requirements for imported products specifically in those sectors.

At this stage, no legislative proposal on the welfare of beef cattle is planned. There is no specific EU animal welfare legislation applicable to beef cattle. Only the general rules of Directive 98/58/EC apply², which do not prohibit open-air pens or feeding practices provided health and weather protection are ensured, and nutritional needs are satisfied.

¹ Commission Communication « EU strategy on livestock », COM(2026) 576 final.

² Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, OJ L 221, 8.8.1998, pp. 23.