

# Do Romanian Farmers and Consumers Have Different Views on Farm Animal Welfare Issues?

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## Abstract

The study was carried out on farmers and consumers from the Western Romania, using the questionnaires developed within the framework of WELANIMAL project in year 2009. The aim of this paper was to identify if there are any differences between the two social categories regarding the issues of farm animal welfare. A number of seven common questions were identified in the questionnaires of farmers and consumers, and a comparative study between these categories was conducted. Farmers considered that dairy cows (70.1%), laying hens (46.8%) and pigs (24.7%) need their current welfare level to be improved, while consumers considered that the welfare status of all the farm animal species mentioned in the questionnaire needed to be improved. Both farmers and consumers considered that sometimes or very rarely could find information about the rearing system on the labels of animal products. Farmers believed that EU legislation exists mostly for farm animal transportation (34.8%) and slaughtering (30.5%), while consumers considered that EU legislation exists for slaughtering (34.8%) and rearing conditions (32.8%). Both farmers and consumers considered that in Romania the animal welfare/protection receives not enough importance (61.3% and 77.4%, respectively), while in the EU this is better than in other parts of the world (46.7% and 50%, respectively). It was concluded that farmers and consumers have either similar or divergent views on specific issues of farm animal welfare.

**Keywords:** farm animal welfare, farmers, consumers, Romania

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## 1. Introduction

EU Policy on Animal Welfare from 2006 to 2010 [1] was recently evaluated in order to be able to establish the new strategy for animal welfare in the future [2]. Results of the evaluation showed that the EU animal welfare legislation has improved the welfare of many of Europe's farm and experimental animals, has helped to reduce competitive distortions in the internal market, the funding for scientific research and advice has made a positive contribution

to policy, have raised the stakeholder and public awareness and responsibility towards animal welfare, have created a shared international understanding of animal welfare issues and standards, have succeeded in striking a balance between the varied needs and expectations of citizens, industry and other groups. In the same time, it was found that the various components of EU animal welfare policy are broadly complementary, mutually support and consistent, and the EU welfare standards have imposed additional costs on the livestock and experimental sectors.

Based on this evaluation and stakeholders' opinions a new strategy for animal welfare is proposed, and by December 2011 will be adopted [3].

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The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2009, amends the current founding treaties and renames it “The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union” [4]. Title II of the Treaty of Lisbon lists some key principles the Union should respect. Here an Article 13 has been introduced with the Lisbon Treaty. It states that: *“In formulating and implementing the Union's agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals, while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage.”*

One of the scopes of the new Animal Health Strategy of the European Union [5] is that the concept of animal health covers not only the absence of disease in animals, but also the critical relationship between the health of animals and their welfare. This is also a pillar for the Commission's policy on public health and food safety.

The roles of various social groups and professions in farm animal welfare was discussed previously [6] in the general acceptance that the animal welfare is now a social demand as consumers become concerned about quality of life of food producing animals.

Even though the knowledge of the consumers regarding the farm animal welfare was assessed previously [7, 8, 9, 10], it was found out that consumers evaluate the current state of animal welfare as rather problematic, while farmers report a more satisfactory evaluation of the present condition of the farm animal welfare [11]. Recently, the knowledge of the Romanian farmers was studied regarding the perception of national and European legislation, application of the existing legislation and standards, as well as the traditions and beliefs that have an impact on farm animal welfare [12].

The aim of the paper was to quantify the differences or similarities that Romanian consumers and farmers have regarding the issues of farm animal welfare.

## 2. Materials and methods

The survey was carried out in year 2009, based on the questionnaires developed within the framework of the WELANIMAL project ([www.welanimal.aku.edu.tr](http://www.welanimal.aku.edu.tr)). Three questionnaires were prepared within the project: one addressed to farmers, one to consumers and one to instructors. All the questionnaires had two types of questions: referring to animal welfare and demographic. Some of the questions were common for farmers and consumers.

Seven common questions found both in farmers and consumers questionnaires were comparatively studied. These questions referred to the species that need the most their welfare/protection to be improved, the specification on the animal products labels, the price the farmers and consumers are willing to pay for animal friendly products, legislation and politics in our country and in the EU, and whether the respondents think animals have sentiments.

Respondents have the opportunity to answer through the WELANIMAL project site, or they were personally interviewed by the students of the Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Timișoara.

A total of 77 questionnaires were returned from the farmers and 138 questionnaires from consumers. These were used in this paper.

The answers to the common questions were statistically analysed, without taking into consideration the demographic influence.

Results were presented by means of graphs of distribution of the answers.

## 3. Results and discussion

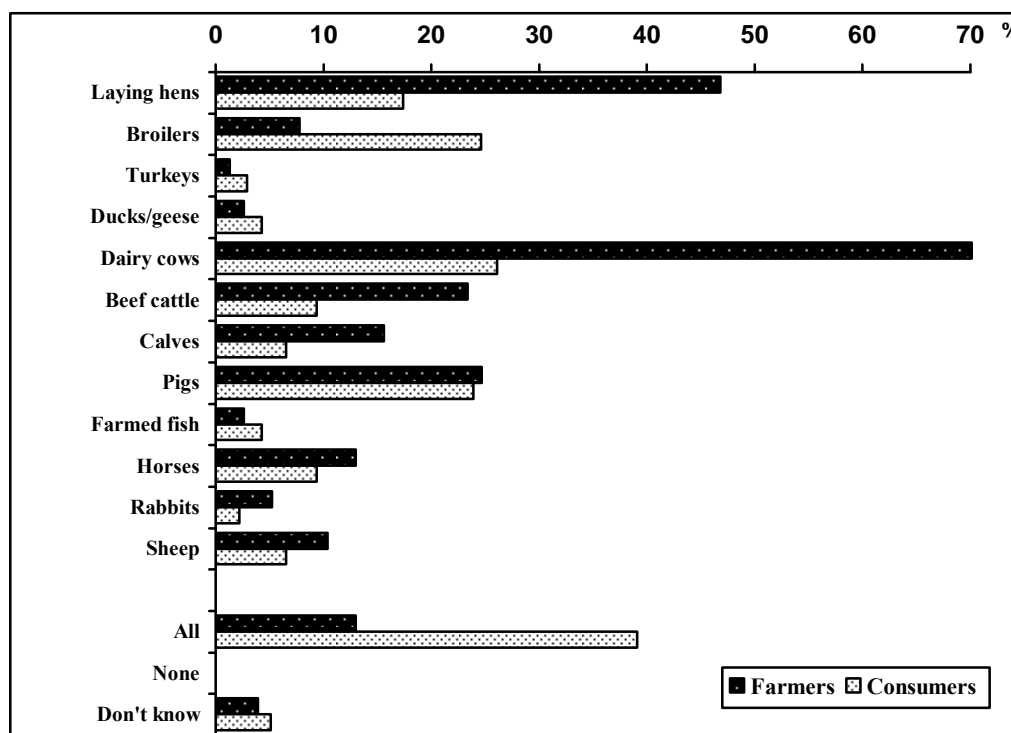
In the first studied question, the priorities for protection of farm animal species was assessed. The question reads as follows: *“In your opinion, from the following list, for which three farm animals should the current level of welfare/protection be improved the most?”*. Out of a list of 15 answers, the respondent has to choose three, according to their opinions. Results are presented in Figure 1.

As it is shown in Figure 1, farmers and consumers have divergent opinions on which farm animals species need the most their level of welfare/protection should be improved.

The majority of farmers (7 from 10) consider that the level of welfare of dairy cows should be

improved the most, followed by laying hens (46.8%), pigs (24.7%) and beef cattle (23.4%). About 15% of the farmers considered that the

welfare/protection of calves should be improved as well.



**Figure 1.** In your opinion, from the following list, for which three farm animals should the current level of welfare/protection be improved the most?

Only 13% of the farmers considered that the welfare/protection of all the farm species should be improved, while the most of the consumers (39.1%) had this opinion. Also, about 2 consumers in 10 considered that the welfare of dairy cows (26.1%), broilers (24.6%), pigs (23.9%) and laying hens (17.4%) should be improved.

These results are not consistent with those reported by Eurobarometer in 2007 [13] when the attitudes of consumers were taken into account. Thus, Romanian consumers put on the first place the welfare of pigs that should be improved (56%), followed by laying hens (55%), broilers (53%), dairy cows (50%), and beef cattle (35%). The other farm animals are mentioned with percentages from 22 to 28%.

Next question studied was "When purchasing eggs, meat or milk can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems?". The respondents have the option to choose only one answer from the following: 1. Yes, most of the time, 2. Yes, some of the time, 3. No, very rarely, 4. No, never, and 5. Don't know. Results are presented in

Figure 2. Responses for this question did not differ between farmers and consumers. Most of both social groups responded that they could find some of the time the information on the labels regarding the way those animal products were produced (36.5% farmers and 29.7% consumers), but a great proportion of them found this information very rarely (21.6% farmers and 27.5% consumers). About 10% of the respondents (farmers or consumers) did not know how to respond to this question.

The following question was intended to find out if farmers and customers are willing to pay more for animal products obtained in welfare friendly production systems. The question reads as follows: "What additional price premium would you be willing to pay for animal products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production System?". Respondents were asked to give only one from the following possible answers: 1. No additional price premium, 2. An additional 5%, 3. An additional 10%, 4. An additional 25%, 5. More than an additional 25%, and 6. Don't know. Results are presented in Figure 3.

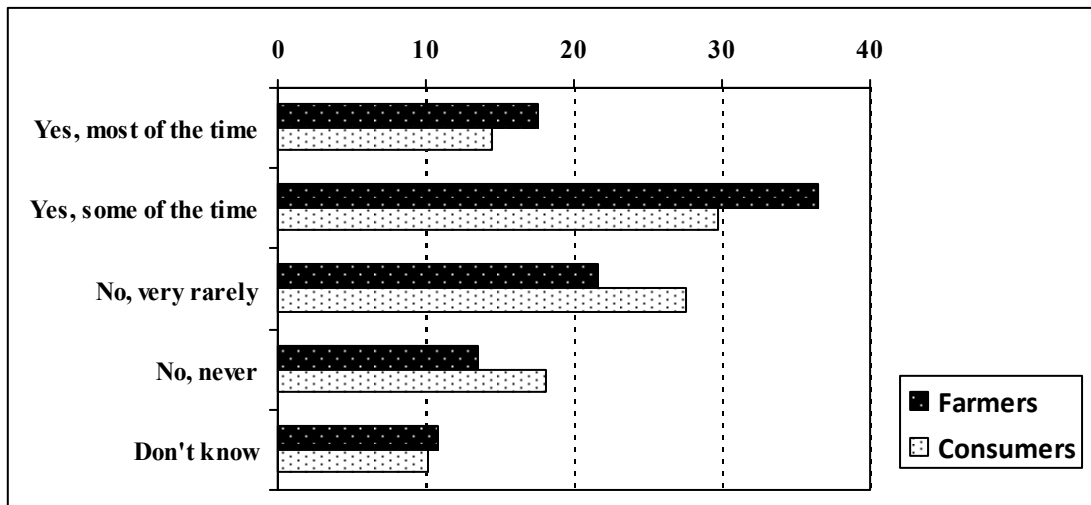


Figure 2. When purchasing eggs, meat or milk can you easily identify from the label those products sourced from animal welfare friendly production systems?

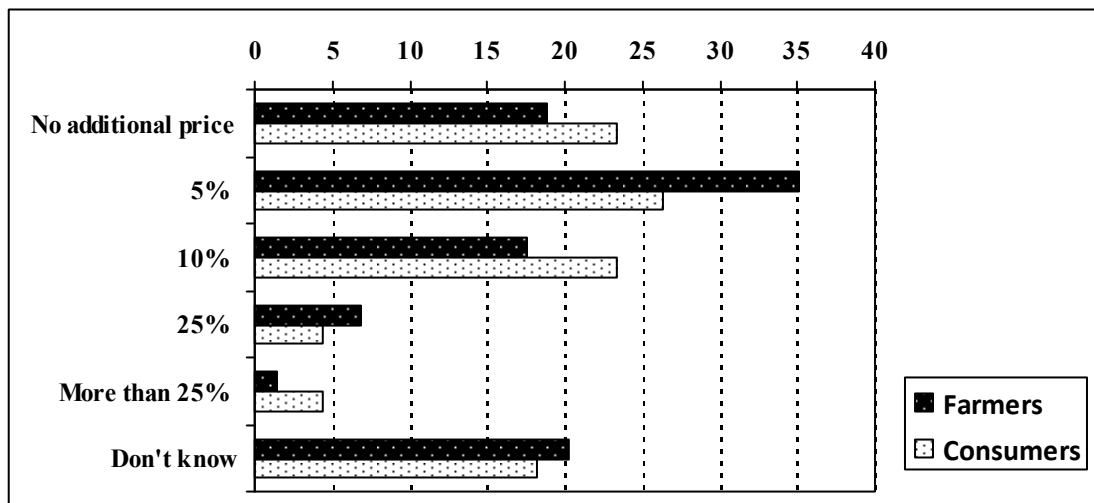


Figure 3. What additional price premium would you be willing to pay for animal products sourced from an animal welfare friendly production system?

Responses to this question differed between farmers and consumers. Almost 4 in 10 farmers responded that they are willing to pay a price premium for welfare of 5%, while only 3 in 10 consumers are willing to pay that premium.

A little less than 20% of farmers responded that they are not willing to pay any more money for animal welfare, while about the same percentage responded that they would pay a price premium of 10% for products sourced in an animal welfare friendly production system.

The same percentage of consumers (23.4%) is not willing to pay more or would pay 10% more for animal products obtained in welfare friendly systems.

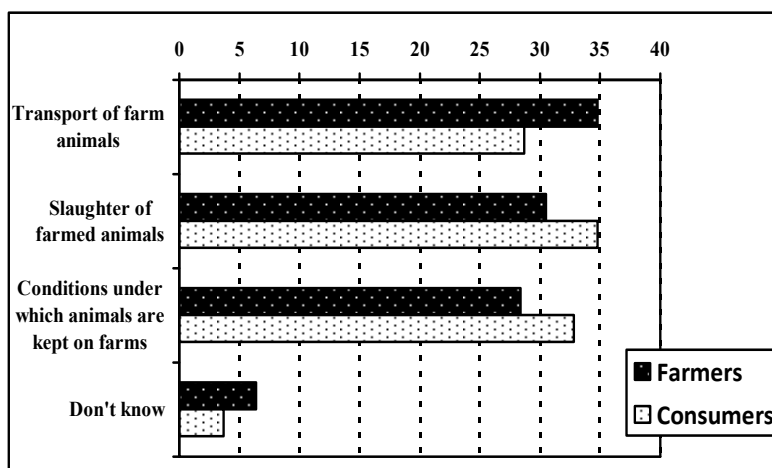
About 20% of both farmers and consumers did not know how to respond to this question.

Another multiple answers question to relieve the perception of the Romanian farmers and consumers of existing legislation was: "From the following subjects related to the welfare/protection of animals, please indicate the ones for which you believe European Union legislation exists". The possible answers were: 1. The transport of farm animals, 2. The slaughter of farm animals, 3. The conditions under which animals are kept on farms and 4. Don't know. Results are presented in Figure 4.

Both farmers and consumers considered that legislation exists in the same extent for all the

three proposed subjects. A low percentage of farmers (6.4%) and even lower of consumers (3.7%) did not know how to respond to this question. This result is somehow in contrast with

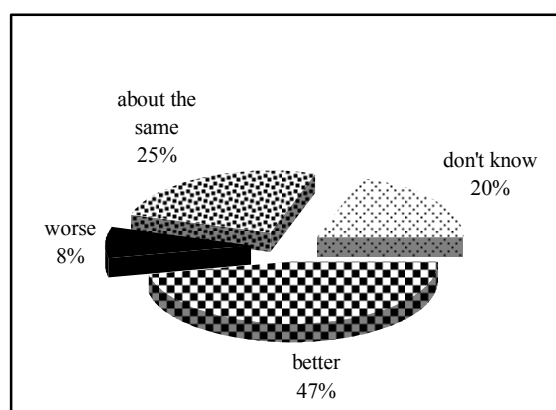
that published by the Eurobarometer in 2007 [13], where 32% of the consumers responded they do not know to answer to this question.



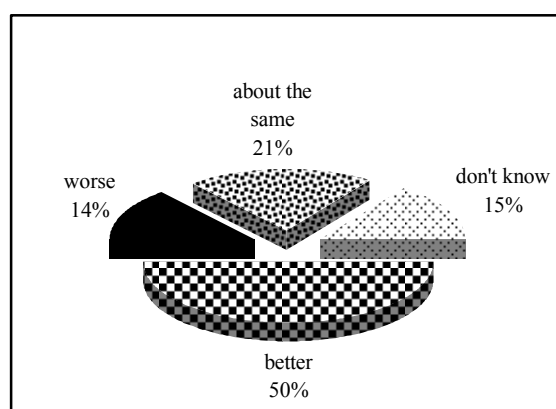
**Figure 4.** From the following subjects related to the welfare/protection of animals, please indicate the ones for which you believe European Union legislation exists

Regarding the knowledge of the level of farm animals protection or welfare in the EU compared to other parts of the world, the answer to the question: "Within the European Union do you believe that the welfare/protection of farm animals is: 1. better than in other parts of the world, 2. worse than in other parts of the world, 3. about the same as in other parts of the world, 4. don't know" showed that about 7 out of 10 farmers and consumers considered that this is at least the same or better than in other parts of the world (Figure 5). Only 8% of the farmers and 14% of consumers considered that in the EU the welfare of farm animals are worse than in other parts of the world, while a rather high percentage of respondents had no knowledge about this subject (20% of farmers and 15% of consumers).

At what level the farmers and consumers know the Romanian policy regarding the animal welfare/protection was assessed through the following question: "In our country's current food and agriculture policy, do you believe that animal welfare/protection receives...?". Respondents had to choose only one answer from the following options: 1. Too much importance, 2. Not enough importance, 3. Just about the right level of importance, 4. Don't know. Results are presented in Figure 6.



**Farmers**

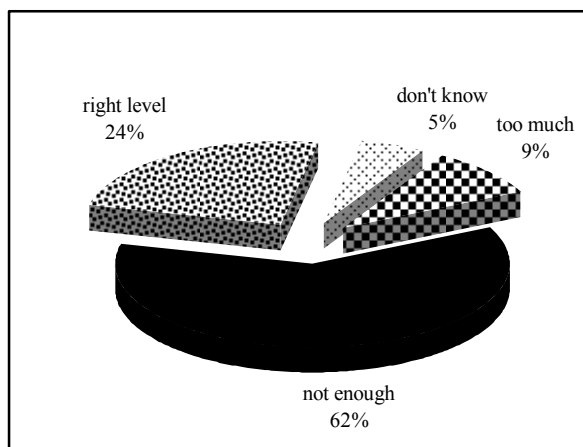


**Consumers**

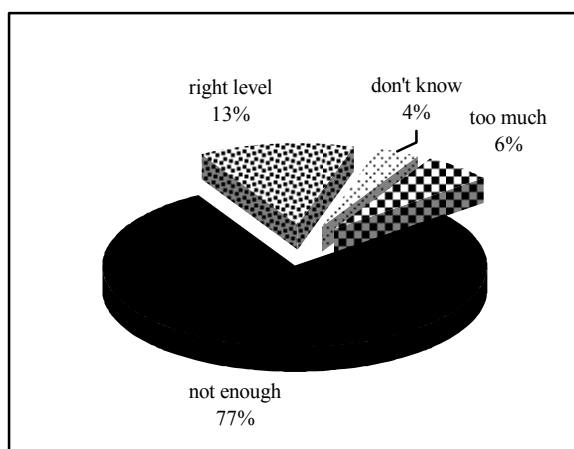
**Figure 5.** Within the European Union do you believe that the welfare/protection of farm animals is...than in other parts of the world?

In spite of the fact that Romania have to comply with the EU legislation regarding the animal welfare and protection, 62% of the farmers and 77% of the consumers considered that this issue is not getting enough importance from our authorities. Twenty four percent of farmers and 13% of consumers considered that this issue receives the right level of importance. These results show the lack of communication of the Romanian authorities the legislation and policy regarding the farm animal welfare and protection. Only few farmers (9%) and consumers (6%) responded that the animal welfare/protection receives too much importance in our country's food and agriculture policy.

Results obtained in this study comply with those reported earlier by the Eurobarometer, 2007 [13].



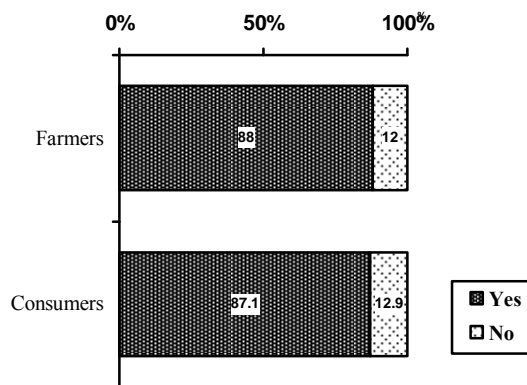
**Farmers**



**Consumers**

**Figure 6.** In our country's current food and agriculture policy, do you believe that animal welfare/protection receives...importance?

When asked if they believe that animals have sentiments, both farmers and consumers responded affirmatively in a high proportion (about 88%, Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Do you believe that animals have sentiments?

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on results of this study, we can conclude that Romanian farmers and consumers have either similar or divergent views on farm animal welfare issues. Thus, both farmers and consumers stated that they would find most of the time or some time information on the label regarding the production system of animal products. Also they believed that there exists EU legislation on transportation, slaughtering and rearing conditions of farm animals, and in the EU the welfare/protection of the farm animals is better than in other parts of the world. Also, both farmers and consumers believed that in the Romanian food and agriculture policy the animal welfare/protection receives not enough importance. Also, 9 out of 10 farmers and consumers do believe that animal have sentiments. Divergences in views of farmers and consumers were found in expressing which farm animal species need their level of welfare/protection be improved. Farmers thought that these species should be dairy cows and laying hens, while consumers considered that the welfare should be improved for all the farm animal species. Also, a high percentage of farmers would pay an additional 5% price premium for animal products to improve the farm animal welfare, while

consumers' responses spread between no premium price, a 5% premium and 10% premium for the same cause.

### Acknowledgements



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