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Consumer information supplements the official (statutory) animal protection efforts in Switzerland

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Introduction

Take a conscious look at how farmers keep their animals in Switzerland today and you will be astounded. You may no longer find the traditional chicken on a dung heap, but luckily, we in Switzerland are still a long way from the industrialised and intensive animal husbandry methods that have long-since become established as standard in many areas of the world. In this country too, livestock farming operations are becoming much bigger than they were, and many technical systems (including robotic milking and computerised feeding units) are gaining ground here too. Nevertheless, animal-friendly forms of husbandry, such as open-bay barns and access to the open air and pastures are now also widespread; they are no longer the rare sight they used to be twenty years ago. In the interim, considerable sections of the Swiss agriculture and livestock industry have also differentiated themselves positively in comparison with other countries in terms of the wellbeing of their livestock and the living conditions of animals on their farms.

All the same, it is still true that “In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king”. Even in our country, millions of animals live in cramped pens with no opportunity to spend time out of doors: calves are fed to make them produce pale meat, which means that they have to be treated with antibiotics more often than other categories of animal. Dairy cattle are pushed to achieve ever better milk yields, and sows give birth to more piglets than they have nipples to feed. It is quite legal to use bare bays to fatten bullocks and pigs, denying them any straw on which to lie or access to the open air. Our agricultural policy also intends to open the door to ever more foodstuffs that are manufactured under production and intensive farming conditions that we ourselves prohibit! This places enormous pressure on the nation’s endeavours towards animal welfare.

We therefore still require action to be taken on animal welfare in the Swiss agricultural sector, and animal protection campaigners should not rely too heavily on the Swiss law governing animal welfare. Firstly, this was only put into effect a few years ago (in 2008), and many of the transitional arrangements still apply. Therefore, the political will for any revision will probably still be weak. We also need to bear in mind that the law on animal protection in Switzerland prescribes husbandry methods that are not particularly animal friendly. In reality, it simply prescribes the boundaries between what is and isn’t allowed.

In the opinion of Swiss Animal Protection SAP, it transpires that the most efficient method of improving animal welfare involves a combination of market economy and statutory measures: the generation of consumer demand for (animal welfare) labelled products on the one hand and the promotion of animal-friendly forms of husbandry through specific, direct payments on the other. The following discourse is an attempt to substantiate this assertion, concluding with a demonstration of the need for action in market, agricultural and environmental policies.

SAP guidelines

First of all, here are a few basic principles that guide the engagement of our organisation with the market and with agricultural policy:

1. The first requirement in animal protection is for people to take responsibility for their own actions, with the State in second place. This is because animal protection measures may be prescribed, but they have to be put into practice on a well-motivated day-to-day basis by farmers and consumers in order for these statutory provisions to take effect for the benefit of the animals.

2. Consumers must be able to recognise the connection between their purchasing behaviour and the actual welfare of animals on farms. Consumers can only evaluate their purchasing behaviour and be prepared to pay the necessary higher price for products based on more animal friendly husbandry if they are properly informed.

3. Rather than preaching consumer denial, SAP advocates sustainable consumption. If we do eat eggs, dairy products and meat, then we should at least ensure that the animals concerned are kept decently and treated considerately. Office-based idealists would probably love to push filthy Mammon entirely out of the picture, but animal protection campaigners know that they have to keep their eyes on the economic realities. On the one hand, even the most animal-friendly farmers want to make a living from their animals, and on the other, even if consumers are highly motivated and friendly towards animals, they will not be able to pay unlimited amounts of money for their food.

4. This pragmatic point of view does not exclude SAP's strenuous efforts to achieve a reduction in the consumption of animal products, or to promote vegetarian and vegan nutrition. The simultaneous pursuit of both paths – campaigning for the sustainable consumption of products from animal-friendly husbandry systems, and demonstration of alternatives to animal products – is neither a contradiction nor an inconsistency. In fact, this is an absolute necessity for those animal protection organisations that want to be measured by the concrete improvements actually achieved for animals – in their stalls, during transportation and when they are being slaughtered. Real animal protection has to mean more than simply preaching and pointing a moralising finger, in some kind of a cheap show of the clean conscience of a better person!

5. People who earn their living from animals and from products of animal origin, who might be farmers, transportation businesses, butchers, retailers or the restaurant trade, all have a clear ethical duty towards animals, which they must fulfil within the constraints of their own environment and capabilities. SAP challenges the food industry on this point on a regular basis.

6. Good animal welfare lies in mankind's own best interests. There is a correlation between the welfare of the animal on the one hand and the quality and safety of the product on the other. According to studies carried out by the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture and the Federal Veterinary Office, adherence to current labelling requirements and the directives contained in the national animal welfare promotion programme may improve the health of animals¹. In some areas, they also increase the quality of the products (e.g. the directive on pasture for cows – an increase in CLA² and omega-3 fatty acids in the milk; free-range chickens – more moist and better taste) and food safety provisions (BTS/RAUS³ pig farms demonstrate evidence of significantly fewer antibiotic-resistant microbes). Keeping grazing animals on pasture also reduces the emissions of ammonia and of carbon dioxide.

7. The State must take action to stop abuse and any practices or husbandry methods that violate animal protection measures; it must also pursue misdemeanours and enforce punishments (in relation to the law on animal protection). In addition, it must also intervene in those cases where the market malfunctions (i.e. where the market and consumers alone cannot put things right; this may be because no (animal welfare) labelled products are available or because the

market may even be promoting methods of keeping livestock that work against animal protection, as in the case of cheap imports from foreign intensive farming operations. This might be achieved by banning imports involving cruelty to animals, requiring an animal protection declaration on foods or promoting animal-friendly stall structures and outdoor rearing.

This activity on the part of the State for the benefit of animal welfare is legitimated by the fact that keeping livestock in a way that is friendly to animals is the most important concern of the Swiss population in relation to agriculture; we are also prepared to invest a relatively large amount of tax revenue for this cause.

The development of the animal welfare label in Switzerland

Let us now turn to the market and to consumers. When KAGfreiland⁴ and Swiss Animal Protection SAP began to advertise and market Swiss Barn and Free Range Eggs specifically in the 1970s, they were the first to do so; no-one would then have predicted such growth for products from animal-friendly farming methods. At the beginning of the 1990s, “Experts” foresaw a revenue of no more than 2-5 % and the attitude of most of the agricultural associations was highly sceptical.

The breakthrough for the animal welfare labels came in 1989, with the collaboration between “Agri-Natura”, the cooperatives organisations, now known as FENACO, and “Gourmet mit Herz”, backed by the MUT Foundation and SAP. Konsumverein Zürich, which was later taken over by the Coop, offered a relatively wide range of “Agri-Natura/Gourmet mit Herz” labelled meat and eggs in its 70 branches. The highly satisfactory demand motivated Migros and Coop to develop their own equivalent label projects.

These subsequently acted as drivers for the further development of these special labels. Thanks to their use, free range eggs and labelled meat achieved the leap from niche to standard product after the turn of the new millennium. In the 1990s, Coop, the major Swiss retailer, issued “Naturaplan” (Organic) and “Naturafarm” (controlled by SAP), the most consistent and hitherto best-known labels. Coop’s rival Migros has changed the names and requirements for the labels several times but has now gained continuity and credibility with “TerraSuisse” and the collaboration with the IP⁵ farmers. Depending on the type of meat involved, the major distributors achieve a turnover of between 20 and 70% on label meat.

The example provided by the major distributors and the growing demand for products based on animal friendly farming methods has inspired other retailers to place more faith in label products. This applies to Manor, Spar and VOLG, for example. By now, Spar also offers restaurateurs an animal friendly range, through TopCC Shops. And even those newcomers from Germany (Aldi and Lidl) offer Swiss organic and free range eggs and a range of label meat, though this is still limited.

In the meantime, some consolidation has taken place among the labels. The wheat has separated from the chaff, the number of labels has grown smaller and they have become more transparent. The requirements of the Swiss BTS and RAUS animal welfare promotion programmes have been accepted as basic requirements by most labels, thus guaranteeing that the majority of the labels really do improve the lot of the animals.

Even though certain agricultural functionaries continue to denigrate the animal protection label idea, these animal protection programmes represent a minor story of success. They offer a livelihood to thousands of country people, improve the image of Swiss farmers, and appeal to millions of consumers who by now buy label products worth about 3 billion CHF every year. Most important of all, however, they have by now resulted in a significantly better life for many millions of animals.

Agricultural policy and animal welfare

Apart from consumers and the commitment of the retailers, the success of the animal welfare label has also been related to the complete overhaul of the Swiss agricultural policy undertaken in 1993. Specifically, animal welfare is only partly a marketable achievement, to be covered by the creation of labels and a corresponding demand from consumers. When it comes to many of the approximately 25 categories of animals used in agriculture, no animal welfare labels can be used to promote an improvement in animal husbandry via the market and consumer demand. This applies to all young and breeding animals, for example, as well as to sows, goats, sheep and horses.

For this reason, the Swiss Federal Government introduced promotion programmes in the mid-1990s with a direct payment system for forms of husbandry that were particularly friendly to animals. SAP lobbied strongly for this idea and pushed it through politically with the help of the environmental and nature protection organisations and the farmers' associations. In addition to the opportunities offered by the market, farmers were expected to take part on a voluntary basis in state-run programmes to promote animal welfare.

Animal friendly forms of livestock husbandry usually give rise to higher costs than those systems that simply conform to the law. They require more work and additional infrastructure (outdoor access, behaviour-appropriate facilities, etc.) and subsistence costs (straw for bedding rather than lying on the bare concrete floor). The additional costs are particularly high in the case of poultry kept for fattening, in that the selection of suitable breeds that will grow slowly and put on less meat means that only about half the fattened birds can be produced per pen and per year compared with conventional Swiss pens.

By covering part of the additional cost, BTS and RAUS contributions offer farmers a certain incentive to provide the socially-desirable added value in terms of animal welfare. The strength of this incentive depends primarily on the following three points:

- The motivation and sensitisation of the farmer towards animal welfare.
- The availability on the farm of infrastructure and accessories (e.g. pen systems; outdoor access; meadows; bedding).
- The synergy between BTS/RAUS and the market: is it possible to join a label scheme?

The ideal pre-conditions are: motivated livestock owners with farms that offer good structural conditions for BTS/RAUS, and who want to convert a category of animals that generate products for which there is a label to BTS/RAUS. Most of the farms currently participating in BTS/RAUS could offer two or even all three of the above pre-requirements.

The need for action in the retail sector

Migros and Coop, who were formerly the drivers of growth for animal welfare products, now seem to be marking time to some extent. Their strategy of offering the broadest possible range of products acts against the interests of the animal welfare range. By now, they have become just one range among many, from the cheap price ranges through a patchwork of special lines – Heidi, Anna's Best, Betty Bossi, Pro Montagna, Jamie Oliver – to premium ranges and children's lines. The advertising and PR budget for animal welfare products has thus melted away, and there is a risk that the interest and creativity of the management and the external credibility of the major retailers' engagement in animal welfare may suffer as a result.

We would like the major retail traders to reflect upon the values that are truly genuine and necessary in relation to the sale of food, where the focus should quite clearly be on production methods that are as close as possible to nature and as kind as possible to animals – regardless of whether the products are then sold in cheap, premium or eco ranges. Perhaps we also need to ask

ourselves whether customers and businesses are in fact well served by the current multitude of product ranges or whether they simply lead to an unnecessary rise in cost at the procurement and sale stages.

While Migros and Coop offer a relatively broad animal welfare range, this could be developed further in the case of most other retailers. For example, only a few retailers offer free range chickens or animal welfare labels on rabbit or lamb meat – replacing them all the more frequently with imported goods produced by intensive farming methods that are prohibited in Switzerland, leading us to repeatedly see “control” as a little-known concept.

SAP would like all the retailers to put the sustainability and animal welfare intentions they present so beautifully in their brochures and on their websites into practice, consistently and emphatically. This relates in particular to the information given to customers about the quality of the animal welfare products, as well as to their procurement policy. Customers should in future at least have a choice in each chain of shops. This also applies to discount chains such as Denner, Aldi and Lidl.

The need for action in the restaurant sector

The restaurant sector represents the largest development location for animal welfare in Switzerland. In 2008, over 13 billion CHF were spent on eating out in Switzerland. Half of all the meat eaten in Switzerland is consumed in restaurants! A quarter of all the meat consumed outside the home contains pork, making it the favourite type of meat away from home, closely followed by beef, with a share of 23%. The trend for poultry is growing, currently standing at a share of 18%.

Four restaurant businesses stand out with regard to their use of meat from animals that have been kept in a way that is appropriate for their species. Based on recommendations made by Swiss Animal Protection SAP, McDonald’s (which has the largest turnover of any restaurant business in Switzerland) has, since February 2010, only used beef raised in Switzerland so that the animals have regular access to the outdoors (RAUS). In 2009, McDonald’s Switzerland procured 3900 tonnes of beef from Swiss farmers, which corresponded to 4.5% of the beef consumed in Switzerland. Migros, Switzerland’s second largest restaurant operator, has used label meat a little longer in its restaurant range. Coop Restaurants, number six in system gastronomy, also chooses label meat relatively consistently.

The “Gout Mieux” foundation (www.goutmieux.ch) lists more than 70 restaurants that are committed to a consistent procurement choice of products from organic and animal-friendly origins. In 2016, SAP signed a cooperation agreement with the sv Group, the largest supplier of several hundred staff restaurants in Switzerland. This bound the parties concerned to the promotion of animal friendly products in the sv Group’s shopping basket. The basis for this agreement is formed by a medium term plan with defined animal welfare targets for each year. Apart from its commitments regarding products of animal-friendly origin, the sv Group has also decided that it will no longer offer hormone-treated meat and that it will forego foie gras, frogs’ legs and other products associated with animal cruelty.

The remaining around 15,000 restaurants, staff restaurants and fast food outlets in Switzerland tend to use few animal friendly products, offering their guests either conventional Swiss and (even more often) imported meat and eggs. The owners of these businesses are frequently not properly informed about the conditions under which livestock is kept at home or abroad, or about the various animal welfare labels.

Since almost half of the meat consumed in Switzerland is used by restaurants, it is extremely important that the gastronomy sector should at last recognise its responsibilities towards animals and their wellbeing! Plenty of guests would pay for these ranges. According to a SAP-Gastro survey in 2011, the owners themselves estimate the guests’ animal welfare potential at 50%. We would

want all restaurants to at least use Swiss free range eggs and to offer two or three menus featuring label meat! In order to convey this message more successfully to the target group, SAP will run a specialist symposium on animal protection for the restaurant sector in 2016.

The need for action in agricultural policy

Animal welfare labels and corresponding marketable products cannot be produced and/or do not exist for about half of all animal categories, e.g. for all breeding animals, sows, sheep and goats. The synergies that operate so splendidly between labels and the market and the BTS/RAUS agricultural policy can play no part here. The incentive to convert to an animal friendly form of husbandry in these animal categories depends exclusively on the level of the statutory contributions from the BTS/RAUS animal welfare support programme. There is no market incentive involving purchasing agreements and an increase in price. When we then add in the unfavourable operational conditions, e.g. housing systems or even complete buildings that could be expected to involve major expenditure to cover the adjustments for BTS/RAUS (construction, infrastructure, costs, etc.), most of the current BTS/RAUS rates are far too low to represent a real incentive in business management terms.

The stagnation seen in BTS/RAUS participation since 2006 originates in these circumstances. This failure of the system works to favour animal protection minimalists and provides far too little support for animal friendly farmers. It is also completely contrary to the interests of the tax payers who finance the CHF 2.5 billion direct payments every year. They want to achieve a more powerful system of support for animal welfare, not to provide support for animal protection minimalists. This situation must change when the law on agriculture and the direct payment system are revised. More powerful support must be given to additional animal welfare provisions that are sensible from a professional point of view and are desired by our society.

The need for action in environmental policy

Over the past few years, scientists have frequently postulated a conjectural contradiction between the aspiration towards animal friendly outdoor rearing methods and climate protection targets⁶. We must therefore state right away that climate protection need not be contradictory to domestic animal husbandry! If we keep animals in a way that suits their species and stick to ecologically-managed agriculture systems, we will create the best possible conditions for success. This approach will also conserve resources – as long as consumers make their own contribution.

We need to differentiate between the industrial forms of animal production (which have unfortunately long-since become the norm in many European countries) and a rural method of keeping livestock that is adapted to suit the location and the relevant species, based primarily on animals that eat rough fodder, such as cows, other cattle, sheep, goats and horses, and can thrive without large quantities of concentrated feed. This type of natural husbandry on pasture land is not climate-relevant – in contrast to industrial animal production methods; in fact, it ensures that CO₂ is increasingly stored in the top soil on the ground. Neither do ruminant animals on pasture compete with human beings for food, since they use permanent grassland that is unsuitable for arable farming, as well as the types of grass and herbage that are inedible to humans. A rural form of animal husbandry with controlled management of the pasture and natural cultivation methods (as practised in organic and IP farms in Switzerland) therefore forms part of the solution to the climate problem – not part of the problem itself!

The use of corn, maize, soya, potatoes, turnips and so on to feed animals is not, in and of itself, bad. For example, poultry are the most efficient of the domestic animals at converting corn into meat (or eggs). The production of plants for human consumption gives rise to large volumes of leftovers, which can be used perfectly well by pigs, who are born “waste processors”. In contrast,

the growing use of feed concentrates for animals who eat rough fodder, particularly in milk and beef production operations, is extremely questionable.

It is true that Switzerland requires just 0.3% of the volume of soya traded worldwide while the EU and China alone consume sixty percent, i.e. two hundred times as much. Nevertheless, it is still worrying that the cultivation of vegetation for fodder is no longer promoted in Switzerland even though current crop breeding methods would make it possible climatically to grow soya here too. In fact, protein imports have tripled and soya imports have grown by a factor of ten. Far too many resources are also squandered unnecessarily in the production and distribution of food in Switzerland. This begins with the housing used for these animals. The extremely high performance demanded from livestock results in the lives of cows, pigs and chickens becoming ever shorter. As a consequence, more animals have to be reared each year to replace the previous generations as they are used up every more rapidly. This requires more fodder, more housing, more energy and more work, with ever greater wear and tear on the animals!

Very little is said about the fact that about 30% of the food produced worldwide ends up being wasted rather than used to benefit of human nutrition. At the current status of food production, this means that it would not only be possible to satisfy the appetite of every human being on the planet right now in principle, but we could also do so in 2050. In view of this, the argument for ever higher performance in our fields and stalls in order to feed mankind simply falls apart.

450,000 tonnes of meat are produced in Switzerland every year. At the same time, this gives rise to 220,000 tonnes of animal by-products; following our experience with BSE and the total ban on feeding livestock on meat and bone meal, these by-products are now mainly disposed of as waste, i.e. incinerated. Of course, we wouldn't complain about the ban on cannibalism, i.e. on feeding a particular species of animal with bone meal made from its own species, as was the case up to 1990. However, the current extreme waste of animal by-products as a resource should give us the impetus to consider some more sensible use, rather than sticking to incineration! After all, this ban is part of the reason for such a large increase in the ecologically questionable importation of feeding concentrates over the past ten years.

By now, the growing demand from affluent Swiss consumers for prime cuts has also led to a fundamental problem, in that it is becoming ever harder to make good use of the remaining parts of any animal that has been bred and slaughtered in this country. This affects animals from organic agricultural systems in particular – after all, customers for organic meat often want prime cuts! This unbalanced demand for prime cuts also requires more animals to be fattened and slaughtered. Livestock farmers try to take this trend into account and choose breeding lines with a high proportion of valuable cuts of meat, which exerts a negative influence on animal health and welfare in pigs and poultry.

The Goal: Switzerland, a country of free range farming

The goal of making “Switzerland, a country of free range farming” will be within our reach if we can develop the market for animal welfare products in the retail trade and the restaurant sector still further, and protect the extensive production methods used by Swiss agriculture on small farms against the competition provided by foreign industrialised factory farms, even in the face of the growing liberalisation of global trade. SAP is firmly persuaded that we can achieve this aim, as long as we all accept our responsibility towards animals in our own localities and according to our own opportunities.

References

1. ETH Zurich; Grangeneuve Agricultural Research Centre, Posieux (FR)
2. CLA = Conjugated linoleic acids
3. BTS = Particularly animal-friendly housing systems; RAUS = Regular exercise in the open air
4. A Swiss animal protection label with very high animal welfare standards (e.g. outdoor requirement and cattle required to have horns)
5. Integrated Production – minimal national animal welfare and eco label, now the de facto minimum standard in Switzerland
6. This discussion centres around the emissions of climate-damaging gases (CO₂ and methane) caused by livestock husbandry.

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