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Animal Welfare Takes Center Stage

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Report Highlights:

Animal welfare is at the heart of the discussion regarding the farming's future in Germany. Federal elections are coming up in September 2017 and animal welfare will be a key agricultural topic. The German government recently published a livestock production strategy to ease public pressure. Higher animal welfare standards on national level would limit the competitiveness of German farmers and reduce import demand for soybeans.

General Information:

Animal welfare is at the heart of a discussion about an “agricultural turnaround” and the future of farming in Germany. Since 2002 animal welfare is enshrined as a national objective in the German Constitution and regulated in the Animal Welfare Act. Thus, animal welfare has become a binding guideline for government action. Christian Schmidt, Minister of Food and Agriculture, stated that he wants to position Germany as a world leader or trendsetter in animal welfare.

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture published its livestock management strategy on June 29, 2017. The greatly publicized and long awaited 60-paged paper highlights the fact that livestock production is gaining broad support in the general public. The report also provides a framework for an accepted and competitive livestock production system. “My goal is to keep livestock farming in Germany. With the livestock management strategy, we will improve the conditions of animals in Germany across a wide front and give our farmers reliability and planning security,” said Minister Schmidt.

The strategy proposes, among other things, a federal program for sustainable livestock production in order to develop practical innovations. One focus will be on the “stables of tomorrow.” Stables will be developed in a way that addresses the conflicts between animal welfare and environmental protection. Investment incentives need to be developed further and directed even more closely to animal and environmental protection. Simplifications in building permission law should help to build new stables and renovate old ones.

Other goals include the introduction of the federal animal welfare label, which is one of the priority measures that the ministry intends to address further. The aim of the label is to improve the transparency of animal welfare practices and to give consumers the opportunity to opt for more animal-friendly options at the counter. The strategy also includes a change in animal breeding to give greater importance to animal health and robustness. Additionally, the objective of area-based livestock production is reaffirmed.

Schmidt emphasized that farmers need to provide consumers with high-quality, sustainable meat products but that it’s important to remember that farmers are also entrepreneurs. “The farmers have to know what demands are being placed on them and how their investments in more animal welfare are paying off in the future,” he said. The strategy leads the way to viable and sustainable livestock management in Germany. From the Minister’s point of view, conflicts in livestock production can be reduced with a clear framework as described in the livestock management strategy, and social support for livestock can be increased. Now Schmidt wants to discuss the strategy with farmers, owners, and the entire industry as well as with the federal states and associations.

The presentation of the livestock management strategy by the Minister garnered different public reactions. Opinions differed when it comes to execution of the strategy. In particular, the few concrete statements about timeline and financing draw criticism. Friedrich Ostendorff, agricultural policy spokesperson of the Green Party, does not see the strategy as a strong signal for the future of livestock production, calling it a “poor and dispirited calming pill to pacify the increasingly loud debate.” Thomas Schröder, President of the German Animal Protection Association, accused the Federal Minister of Economics of creating a plan far too late to align the measures of the federal government, the federal

states, and local authorities on a common goal. In addition, the issue will now be a topic in the election campaign.

Outlook and Impact on Trade

The strategy paper is a much needed basis for the discussion between the German government, federal states, farmers, other representatives of the value chain, as well as the environmental and animal welfare associations. All stakeholders should be concerned about getting livestock out of the negative headlines because the objectives of the livestock management strategy are more important than ever:

- Livestock production needs the consent from the general public.
- Government and the Federal States agree on common guidelines for the future of livestock production.
- Conflicts between environmental issues and animal welfare should be reduced.
- Livestock farmers need political reliability for their investment decisions.

The German Government and Minister Schmidt have continuously been criticized for appearing apprehensive in developing concrete legislative measures to improve animal welfare. It is doubtful that this topic and the future of agriculture will play no part in the ongoing Bundestag election campaign. The Green party will make animal welfare one of its main campaign topics. Even more so since some stakeholders are ultimately less concerned with improving animal welfare but rather with the disappearance of livestock production in Germany and its relocation abroad. The conflict is also clearly evident between the societal demands on pork production and the economic needs for farmers. The strategy could be an important milestone for the future of livestock production in Germany. The common objectives set out by the strategy could become a baseline for the new government's agricultural policy.

The ongoing animal welfare discussion has already changed the situation for German pork farmers. German pork farmers face stricter regulations than most of their European competitors and this trend will continue. The government lobbies towards the improvement of animal welfare standards at the European level, but the outlook for any change in European regulation is not very positive. Higher animal welfare standards on the national level limit the competitiveness of German farmers. Stricter animal welfare regulations in Germany would ultimately lead to a reduction in pork and poultry numbers, which would reduce import demand for soybeans. It would also reduce the export availability of pork and poultry. In recent years, Germany has become one of the main competitors for U.S. pork and poultry in Asia. For more information, please see GAIN report: [Agricultural Turnaround starts with Animal Welfare](#).