INTRODUCTION

Compassion in World Farming is an international farm animal welfare organisation, working around the world to improve the lives of farm animals. Compassion in World Farming – Ireland was founded 20 years ago and I have been involved from the start.

One of the most significant successes during that time is that animals are now recognised in EU law as ‘sentient beings’\(^1\), which means it is acknowledged that they can suffer and feel pain, and they can also enjoy a sense of well-being.

IRELAND’S SELLING POINT

In this difficult and highly competitive time, Ireland’s big selling point for agricultural exports is quality, which includes good animal welfare standards. Ireland is well set up for this because:

- we have a relatively clean environment which, as an island, we have a greater degree of control over;
- we have excellent grass;
- as an island, we are better able to guard against animal diseases;
- we have a very long tradition of farming and huge expertise.

Animal welfare is an integral part of this ‘quality’ and all our farming must be done to the highest possible animal welfare standards. Already, there is a very good foundation for this:

- nearly half (43\%) of our egg production is cage free\(^2\), and most of this is free-range. Ireland is fully compliant with the barren battery cage ban\(^3\) that came into force on 1\(^{\text{st}}\) January this year;
- our beef and dairy farming is grass-based as opposed to the intensive indoor or feedlot production that is common in some other countries;
- we have very good animal welfare standards in our certified Irish organic production;
- the Government has an excellent Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council, which includes representatives of Veterinary Ireland, farm lobby groups, exporters, livestock markets, the Department’s of Agriculture (North and South), and animal welfare organisations including myself representing Compassion in World Farming - Ireland.

We cannot let animal welfare problems impact negatively on our image as a producer of high quality food. There are some serious outstanding animal welfare issues that need to be addressed without delay and I am now going to discuss these.

\(^1\) The Lisbon Treaty includes animal sentience as an Article
\(^2\) European Commission Food & Veterinary Office Audit carried out in Ireland in March 2012
\(^3\) As above
ANIMAL WELFARE ISSUES

1. PIG WELFARE

We all associate happy pigs with curly tails and there’s good reason for this.

According to a UK Farm Animal Welfare Council report⁴, the state of a pig’s tail is a good indicator of the animal’s general welfare. The report says that an intact, uninjured tail on a pig when it goes to slaughter indicates that the tail has neither been docked (i.e. part of the tail cut off by the farmer) nor bitten off by other pigs, and that this infers that the animal’s ‘welfare was good’.

In Ireland, the vast majority of pigs are reared on intensive farms, and it is appalling that hardly any commercial pigs in Ireland have intact tails. Although routine tail docking is prohibited by EU pig welfare law, an Irish abbatoir study in 2010⁵ found that 99% of pigs had docked tails.

A large part of the reason for the high percentage of pigs with docked tails is that many Irish pig farmers are failing to provide pigs with effective enrichment material, such as straw, that enables the pigs to carry out proper investigation and manipulation activities, despite this being a legal requirement under EU pig welfare legislation. Scientific studies have shown that if pigs cannot carry out these very important natural behaviours then they are at serious risk of resorting to abnormal tail-biting behaviour. Instead of improving the environment, as they are required to do under EU law, farmers are simply docking the pigs’ tails, even though docking in these circumstances is prohibited under EU law.

It is essential for the good welfare of pigs that they are provided with effective enrichment material, such as straw, wood chips or wood shavings, so that they can carry out their natural investigation and manipulation activities; and it is also a legal requirement to provide such material. So-called ‘toys’, which are the predominant materials given to Irish pigs,⁶ are not effective. The European Commission has said that scientific opinion concludes: “there is little evidence that provision of toys such as chains, chewing sticks and balls can reduce the risk of tail biting.”⁷ Compassion in World Farming has produced a useful booklet about enrichment materials for pigs, which can be downloaded from our website.

If Ireland wants to be seen as a country that takes farm animal welfare seriously as part of its high quality food production, then the EU legislation on pig welfare must be enforced: Irish pigs should have effective enrichment material and routine tail docking should not be carried out.

We need to achieve a large increase in the number of pigs that have intact, uninjured tails when they go for slaughter, which would indicate to other countries that our pig welfare standards are good.

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⁴ ‘Farm animal welfare in Great Britain: past, present and future’, UK Farm Animal Welfare Council, 2009
⁵ ‘Improving pig welfare will reduce carcass losses’ by Laura Boyle & Dayane Lemos Teixeira, Teagasc Pig Farmers Conferences, October 2010
⁶ Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, Irish Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council Minutes, November 2010
⁷ European Commission answer to a Parliamentary Question, 11th December 2009
2. ANIMAL TRANSPORT

Live exports to EU countries

Some transporters carrying live animals from Ireland to the Continent by ferry and road continue to flout EU legislation regarding animals’ permitted travel times and legally-required rest periods. This is a very long-standing problem that Compassion in World Farming – Ireland has highlighted over many years. It is appalling that some transporters are continuing to put animals’ welfare and Ireland’s reputation at risk.

Most recently, in January and February this year (2012), the German animal welfare organisation Animals’ Angels trailed livestock vehicles after they arrived at Cherbourg in France on the Celtic Link ferry from Rosslare (some Northern Ireland companies, some Republic of Ireland). They observed the following breaches:

- Although the permitted travel time for adult cattle is 28 hours, one truck travelled by ferry and road for a total of 34 hours before stopping to unload and rest the animals.
- Three of the vehicles cut short the rest breaks for animals in France: stopping and unloading the animals for 13½ and 14½ hours instead of the required 24 hours for adult cattle; and stopping for 9 hours instead of the required 12 hour rest at, or in the immediate vicinity of, Cherbourg port for calves.

There should be proper enforcement of the EU animal transport law and, to this end, Compassion in World Farming – Ireland and Animals’ Angels have made a Formal Complaint to the European Commission regarding Ireland’s continued failure in this regard.

Live exports to non-EU countries

Ireland used to ship out thousands of live cattle to countries in the Middle East and North Africa, e.g. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Lebanon, for slaughter. There was evidence of appalling welfare problems for animals in these countries. In particular, slaughter conditions could be very poor indeed.

When our campaign to stop EU subsidies for this trade ended in success in December 2005, the trade virtually ceased. However, recently there have been reports in the farming press saying that live cattle exports from Ireland to non-EU countries in the Middle East/North Africa could re-start.

The OIE (international animal health organisation) has drawn up guidelines for the protection of animals during transport and at slaughter. Whilst not legally binding or detailed, these would be helpful. However, many OIE member countries, including in North Africa and the Middle East, have failed to implement the guidelines and animal welfare standards in these countries continue to be generally very poor.

For example, recent film footage from slaughterhouses in Egypt shows:

- Slaughtermen killing fully-conscious cattle by stabbing a knife into the animal’s neck several times, instead of a full cut across the throat, so that the animals bleed slowly. A rope is then tied round the neck, which appears to cause suffocation. In all, the cattle take about 10 minutes to die.
- Cattle being beaten very hard on the head with a large metal pole, often taking several blows before the animal is so dazed it falls to the ground, where its throat is then cut.

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8 “Investigations into transport of cattle from Ireland to Continental Europe, January & February 2012”, Animals’ Angels 9th March 2012
We are not singling out Egypt: a study by the World Bank\(^9\) has shown serious welfare problems at slaughter in other non-EU countries, including in the Middle East and North Africa.

We have made a short film showing the animal welfare problems in some OIE countries. It makes very difficult viewing but is available on request.

Compassion in World Farming – Ireland is totally opposed to any resumption of live exports to countries in North Africa and the Middle East, both because of the very long journeys that Irish animals would be subjected to and because we know there are serious animal welfare problems in these countries, particularly at slaughter. Certainly, until such times as these animals can be guaranteed the basic protection of the standards laid down in the OIE guidelines, there should be no discussion of resuming live exports to non-EU countries. Instead exports should be in the form of meat.

**Jobs lost through live exports**

If meat is exported instead of live animals it means that long stressful journeys are avoided and the welfare of the animals is under our control. It also keeps jobs in Ireland. In 2011, Ireland exported 214,500 live cattle and calves\(^10\). Meat Industry Ireland has said that: “every 100,000 animals going out as live export is the equivalent of two meat plants and 400 or 500 jobs.”\(^11\)

### 3. FUR FARMING

There are 5 mink farms operating in the Republic of Ireland. There used to also be foxes farmed for fur.

At the time of writing, we await the outcome of Minister Coveney’s fur farming Review Group. We made a comprehensive submission to the group, urging them to recommend fur farming should be banned because:

1. Mink and foxes are unlike other farm animals: although bred on the farm, they are not fully domesticated and are not herd or flock animals. This makes them unsuitable for commercial production.
2. The needs of mink and foxes cannot be catered for in farm cages – at minimum, mink need to be able to swim and foxes need to be able to dig.
3. There is, in our view, no practical and humane alternative way of rearing commercial quantities of mink and foxes. Therefore, fur farming should be banned.

Fur farm cages have not improved in any significant way since a major scientific report\(^12\) by the European Commission concluded, in 2001, that:

- “The typical mink cage with a nest box and wire mesh floor impairs mink welfare because it does not provide for important needs”;
- “The typical fox cage does not provide for important needs of foxes.”

\(^9\) ‘Global study of livestock markets, slaughterhouses and related waste management systems’, World Bank
\(^10\) Bord Bia Newsletter, Spring 2012
\(^11\) Oireachtas debate, 10\(^{th}\) March 2010
\(^12\) ‘The welfare of animals kept for fur production’, European Commission’s Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare, December 2001
The last Government had agreed to phase out fur farming, which would bring the Republic of Ireland into line with Northern Ireland, where fur farming is already illegal. Fur farming is banned in the UK.

We believe that banning fur farming in the Republic of Ireland would give out a very clear message that we do not tolerate farming practices that deny animals the possibility of carrying out their important natural, instinctive behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Ireland cannot afford to be complacent. These farm animal welfare problems should be addressed without delay. Where EU or national laws are flouted, then this must be stopped. Our image of high quality food production is our selling point and good farm animal welfare standards are an integral part of this.

ACHIEVEMENTS THAT WE HAVE SEEN SINCE COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING – IRELAND STARTED 20 YEARS AGO:

- Most importantly, **animals are now recognised as ‘sentient beings’** in EU law;

- Another important success is the EU ban on the **barren battery cage** for laying hens on 1st January this year – the end to an iconic symbol of all that’s wrong with factory farming;

- **Sow stalls** will become illegal throughout the EU on 1st January 2013 – from that date, sows will only be allowed to spend the first month of pregnancy confined in narrow individual stalls. After that, they will have to be kept in groups for the rest of their pregnancy;

- The cruel **veal crate** that confined calves in a small box-like individual pen became illegal throughout the EU in 2007;

- **Electro-immobilisation** involves passing an electric current through a fully conscious animal to make its muscles go into spasm, thereby freezing it into a stationary position so that procedures such as de-horning can be carried out. This inhumane practice was banned in the Republic of Ireland in 2007.

- **Deer velveting** (the practice of cutting antlers off farmed deer at the stage when they are very sensitive, blood filled structures) was banned the Republic of Ireland in 1994.

For further information about our work, please visit our website at [www.ciwf.ie](http://www.ciwf.ie)

*Note re photographs: All photos are of Irish animals except the first one on page 1 and some of the photos on this page. All photos are copyright Compassion in World Farming except the electro-immobilisation photo above, which is copyright to Animal Liberation NSW Australia.*