

Contribution of ERPA

Public Consultation of the European Commission regarding the Roadmap on the “Farm to Fork Strategy”

INTRODUCTION

The European Rural Poultry Association (ERPA) welcomes the willingness of the European Commission to develop a sustainable food strategy as a key to reach the goals of the EU's Green Deal, by creating more efficient, climate-smart systems that provide healthy food, while securing a decent living for EU farmers.

ERPA is fully committed in preserving animal health and welfare, respecting environment, defending economic sustainability in rural areas, guaranteeing quality products and meeting consumers' expectations... in the different European countries.

ERPA would like to ensure that the “Farm to Fork” Strategy will take into account the specificities of the free range rural poultry productions and that the texts will be implemented harmoniously in all the Member States in Europe.

FUTURE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will be one of the tools for implementing the “Farm to Fork” Strategy.

ERPA would like to underline that even if rural poultry meets perfectly European citizens' expectations, the future CAP makes very little room for them (currently no funds), whereas there could be several types of support: aids to investments and targeted training for these productions, to the development of outdoor areas, to the controls for official quality signs, etc.

ERPA calls for better support for rural poultry in the future CAP via sectoral interventions, eco-schemes or rural development funds, for example. In order to achieve this goal, ERPA is in favour of a strong budget for the new CAP and a truly common policy that must, of course, adapt to the specificities of the Member States but must also maintain a level playing field among the countries.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

ERPA members are already fully engaged in the European transition to agroecology.

First of all, we can underline that generally the greenhouse gas emissions and the impact on the environment of poultry meat production are low comparing to other meat productions.

But rural poultry farmers go beyond the regulatory requirements in terms of preservation of the environment, biodiversity and climate sustainability and should be more supported for this commitment (including via the CAP).

Rural poultry is a small-scale production and contributes to the layout of free-range areas with numerous native flora and fauna varieties. They help to preserve a huge diversity in poultry / hens strains and use very little/none chemical pesticides or fertilizers. The hardiness of our poultry results also in limited use of antibiotics, replaced by alternative measures like essential oils, plants, probiotics... With a strong attachment to the principle of the « link to the land », which means that the majority of animal feed has to be cropped on the same farm as the poultry, we support the transition to a circular economy.

ERPA also represents the small-scale organic poultry farming and has been proactive in the discussions on the new Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labelling of organic products of 30 May 2018. Nevertheless, ERPA regrets the disappearance of the size limits of poultry buildings and the non-definition of slow growth for chickens for example. For us it is not in line with the ethics of organic productions and can generate significant distortions between operators.

HIGH LEVEL IN ANIMAL WELFARE

It is in the DNA of rural poultry defended by ERPA to respect a high level of animal welfare and to promote the best breeding practices: **extensive and free-range farming, rustic slow-growing breeds adapted to outdoor rearing from an early age, low densities, limited sizes for farms and buildings...**

It would therefore be natural for rural poultry to be highly valued in the context of future European discussions on animal welfare, especially since standard poultry raised in confinement is increasingly appropriating notions related to animal welfare.

ERPA has also been participating to the EU Platform on animal welfare since 2017 and follows the European discussions to improve animal welfare and meet the European citizens' expectations in this field. Besides, ERPA supports the development of animal welfare indicators and has begun to work towards objectifying the welfare in poultry productions.

HIGH STANDARDS IN ANIMAL HEALTH

Regarding the animal health issues, ERPA believes in the importance of providing safe food to European consumers. **ERPA wishes to guarantee an exemplary high standard of health for rural poultry, with conditions adapted to free range production and to small farms and slaughterhouses.** Indeed, it is crucial to allow these productions to be able to continue existing, while guaranteeing their seriousness and their professionalism.

For example, ERPA produced a standard form to facilitate the registration of individuals and ensure the traceability of poultry to individuals, in a homogeneous manner throughout Europe.

Moreover, ERPA has a willingness to spread good practices and prevent risks of disease outbreaks like Avian Influenza. For example, ERPA produced and disseminated recommendation sheets in several languages on strict and homogenous biosecurity measures in poultry farming to all the rural poultry farmers in Europe. These sheets are the result of a work carried out by ERPA in 2017, which first consisted in comparing the biosecurity regulations of several Member States to protect against Avian Influenza.

Finally, ERPA is member of the Animal Health and Welfare Advisory Committee of DG SANTE and contributed to the discussions on Official Controls and the Animal Health Law.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL AREAS

Rural poultry production is made by a large number of primary producers and stakeholders. It contributes to the economic sustainability and the upholding of social life in rural areas:

- **Thousands of producers**, including family farms with family capital, produce approximately 400,000,000 rural poultry (both meat and eggs) per year in Europe;
- **A large number of stakeholders** also work for this sector: hatchers, feed producers, farmers, slaughterhouses, to which must be added the indirect jobs: transporters, tools manufacturers, veterinarians, etc.

By maintaining a viable base of human scaled farms and slaughterhouses in the territories, rural poultry productions ensure proximity and quality networks as well as jobs in rural areas. In short, they allow the existence and the dynamisation of rural areas.

FOOD QUALITY – HEALTHY DIETS

ERPA members produce **free range poultry**, reared in **extensive farming** respecting animal welfare. They use a huge diversity of **species** and **colored birds** coming from rustic **slow-growing strains** adapted to outdoor rearing.

Some of these products (meat and eggs) are sold as "traditional", or with national or European signs of origin and quality: organic, Label Rouge, PGI, PDO.

On top of that, poultry meat and eggs are recommended by the nutritionists as they are loaded with high-quality protein, low fats, good fatty acids, vitamins, minerals, and various other nutrients.

The excellence in breeding methods and the know-how of all the stakeholders involved in the production chain guarantee that tasty and high-quality products are provided to European consumers. As a consequence, this can reduce food loss and waste at the final consumption stage.

FOOD INFORMATION TO CONSUMERS

ERPA considers that the marketing standards for agricultural products are crucial in Europe, as they make it possible to standardize the references for producers, to ensure clear and uniform information to consumers and to promote the extensive farming.

These standards make it possible to value and protect alternative farming methods for the benefit of rural poultry and their producers and for accurate information for consumers, so that they are able to make informed choices and are protected against fraudulent practices.

ERPA has very specific positions regarding the marketing standards:

- ▶ **Regarding the standards for poultry meat:**
 - Maintain current definitions and rules of use for types of farming, with voluntary labelling;
 - Maintain the obligation to control types of farming, with defined frequencies;
 - Maintain the possibility of adding national rules by the Member States.
- ▶ **Regarding the standards for eggs:**
 - Maintain the current definitions and rules of use for farming methods;
 - Add the requirement for an annual inspection of all alternative farming methods (codes 1 and 2) to verify the correct application of the criteria defined in the standards;
 - Add the obligation to mark eggs at the farm.

ERPA is the first European network created in 2007 to represent professional producers of rural poultry (meat and eggs) in Europe.

Their missions are:

- *To **represent professional producers of rural poultry** in the UE;*
- *To **help preserve rural poultry production** and its **genetic diversity** in Europe, by recognizing its specificities in the European legislation;*
- *To **promote in particular extensive and family-based methods of farming, open-air breeding and coloured birds from rustic slow-growing strains.***

ERPA's members are national associations of rural poultry producers from Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Czech Republic, Romania... and also breeders intended for these productions (meat and eggs).