

Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel
Commissioner for Agriculture
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
Bruxelles 1049

20th June 2005

Dear Commissioner,

Re: WTO and animal welfare

I would like to express my concern at the low priority being given to animal welfare by the European Commission during the WTO Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations.

The background for my concern is that the WTO rules are making it difficult for the EU to maintain its standards of animal welfare and introduce improvements. Enhanced welfare standards, such as those enacted by the EU for pigs and laying hens, generally involve increased production costs. This makes EU farmers vulnerable to imported meat and eggs produced to lower, and hence less costly, welfare standards as the WTO rules are usually viewed as preventing members from restricting imports on welfare grounds. The danger that its farmers may be undermined by lower-welfare imports makes it difficult for the EU to press ahead with welfare improvements.

In light of these difficulties, I welcome the EU's statement in its Comprehensive Negotiating Proposal to the WTO that its objective is to ensure that trade liberalisation does not undermine EU efforts to improve the welfare of animals.

I am, however, concerned that the European Commission's commitment to making progress on animal welfare in the DDA negotiations appears to have diminished over the last 18 months. There has been little recent indication that the Commission is giving attention to animal welfare in negotiations.

Accordingly, I urge you to revitalise the Commission's efforts on animal welfare, bearing in mind that:

- the Council has previously stated that an appropriate balance has to be struck in the WTO negotiations between trade and non-trade concerns including animal welfare, and

- the EU's Comprehensive Negotiating Proposal to the WTO stresses the importance of ensuring that trade liberalisation does not undermine EU efforts to improve the welfare of animals.

In particular, I would like you to seek better results in the following areas:

Green box: One way of addressing the unequal conditions of competition that arise when farmers in the EU (or any other WTO member) work for higher animal welfare standards than third country producers is for the EU to assist its farmers with the additional costs incurred in meeting high welfare standards. The EU's Comprehensive Negotiating Proposal advocates that such payments should be included in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture's (AoA) 'Green Box'; Green Box items are not subject to the usual AoA rules requiring subsidies to be reduced. The Commission has, however, failed to raise this point in the negotiations for some considerable time. The Commission will need to show much greater determination if it is to succeed on this issue.

Labelling: Mandatory labelling enables consumers to make informed choices as well as facilitating a market-led approach to EU concerns. The Commission should seek recognition that mandatory labelling as to farming method is consistent with the WTO rules.

Developing countries: The EU will not be able to change developing countries' perception that its position on animal welfare is protectionist unless it can convince them that there are indeed real trade opportunities in EU markets for welfare-friendly products from developing countries. I urge you to offer developing countries:

- trade-related assistance and capacity building to help them develop sustainable farming systems with good animal welfare standards on-farm, during transport and at slaughter, and
- preferential market access, for example through lower or zero tariffs, for welfare-friendly products. At a recent meeting, when answering a question about certain developing countries, the Trade Commissioner was very positive about the possibility of providing preferential access for such products.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



Dr. Caroline Lucas
Green Party MEP for South East England

