



MINISTÈRE
DE L'AGRICULTURE,
DE L'AGRO-ALIMENTAIRE
ET DE LA SOUVERAINETÉ
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Ministry of Agriculture, Agri-food and Food Sovereignty

Evaluation of the impact of the CAP Strategic Plan on animal welfare in France

Evaluation summary

March 2026

1. Context of the evaluation

Within the framework of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Ministry of Agriculture, Agri-food and Food Sovereignty (MAAFS) commissioned an evaluation of the impact of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) on animal welfare in France.

The evaluation is overseen by a dedicated Steering Group that monitored the entire evaluation process. This group is composed of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Agri-food and Food Sovereignty (BCDR, CEP, BBEA), the Rural Development Observatory (ODR), the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (INRAE), and the regions of Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Hauts-de-France. This evaluation forms part of the national evaluation plan provided for under Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, which organises evaluation activities across the entire 2023–2027 programming period.

This evaluation was conducted from a thematic perspective focusing on animal welfare and covers the years 2023 and 2024, corresponding to the first two effective years of programme implementation. The evaluation work makes it possible to analyse the contribution of CAP interventions to animal welfare, as well as their coherence and complementarity with other relevant measures.

The evaluation was carried out over a 12-month period (January 2025–January 2026) and structured into three phases: the scoping phase (January–March 2025), the data collection and analysis phase (April–September 2025), and the finalisation and recommendations phase (October 2025–January 2026).

2. Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- ▶ **Assess the results of animal-welfare-targeted interventions and estimate their contribution to improvements in animal welfare;**
- ▶ **Identify other CAP Strategic Plan interventions that may contribute to improving animal welfare and assess their results in terms of animal welfare outcomes;**
- ▶ **Assess the coherence and complementarity between CAP support integrating the issue of animal welfare and regulatory measures outside the CAP framework.**

The evaluation is carried out within the following scope:

- ▶ **Interventions covered by the evaluation:** measures for the development of organic farming (70.01 to 70.05), agri-environment-climate measures (AECMs) related to animal welfare (70.09), the eco-scheme through organic farming certification (31.01), and support for on-farm productive investments (73.01 and 73.09);
- ▶ **Thematic scope:** in addition to the measures listed above, the evaluation includes CAP Strategic Plan measures not explicitly dedicated to animal welfare but likely to contribute to its improvement, namely coupled support for the bovine, suckler calf, ovine and caprine sectors (32.01, 32.02, 32.03, 32.04, 32.05) and areas facing natural constraints payments (ANC) (71.01 to 71.15);
- ▶ **Sectors:** cattle (dairy, suckler, veal and suckler calves), pigs, broiler chickens and laying hens, dairy and meat goats and sheep, mule ducks and rabbits;
- ▶ **Temporal and geographical scope:** the first two years of the programming period (2023 and 2024) covering the entire French territory (mainland France, Corsica and outermost regions), with a specific focus on six regions (Bretagne, Pays de la Loire, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Bourgogne–Franche-Comté, Auvergne–Rhône-Alpes, Provence–Alpes–Côte d'Azur).

3. Evaluation framework

The evaluation framework serves as the overarching analytical structure for the evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan with regard to animal welfare. The framework was refined during the scoping phase on the basis of a documentary review and exchanges with the Steering Group and subsequently consolidated throughout the evaluation work. This framework is intended to serve as the analytical basis for:

- ▶ Examining the relevance of CAP Strategic Plan interventions with regard to animal welfare (**relevance** criterion);
- ▶ Identifying the degree of implementation of CAP Strategic Plan interventions related to animal welfare and the results of these interventions (**effectiveness** criterion);
- ▶ Assessing the coherence and complementarity between the different support schemes (**coherence** criterion);
- ▶ Identifying the European Union added value through EAGF and EAFRD funding (**EU added value** criterion);
- ▶ Assessing the adequacy between resources and results, as well as identifying bottlenecks and enabling factors (**efficiency** criterion).

Thirteen evaluation questions stem from these evaluation criteria. They are set out in Section 5 and form the analytical framework underpinning all findings presented in the remainder of this evaluation summary.

4. Methodological approach and data

Methodological approach

The methodological approach is **inspired by the theory of change**. This approach enables to describe how interventions implemented under the CAP Strategic Plan are expected to lead to change, by identifying causal links as well as external factors that may have contributed to the observed changes.

Within this theoretical framework, the **reconstruction of the intervention logic of the animal-welfare measures under the CAP Strategic Plan** was a key task during the scoping phase and was discussed with the Steering Group. The intervention logic **describes the underlying theory of action and the cause-and-effect relationships between intervention modalities, in particular outputs and results**. It is essential for clarifying the links between interventions, their objectives and the intended animal-welfare outcomes.

The methodological approach combined **two levels of analysis – the national level and the farm level** – in order to produce robust and nuanced evaluative judgements, capable of situating the findings over time and across contexts.

Data sources

The evaluation is based on a structured mix of **both primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data**, which were triangulated to ensure the robustness of the conclusions.

At **national level**, the data collected for the analysis include:

- ▶ A technical and scientific in-depth literature review;
- ▶ Two online surveys targeting beneficiaries and operators, launched respectively in August 2025 for eight weeks and in September 2025 for four weeks;
- ▶ Seventy cross-cutting and sector-level interviews conducted between April and October 2025;
- ▶ Two focus groups carried out in December 2025, involving respectively 13 ruminant farmers and 11 pig farmers.

At **farm level**, the data collected for the analysis include:

- ▶ Interviews with farmers conducted by animal welfare experts on 74 farms across the 11 sectors studied, focusing on their relationship with animal welfare and CAP support received;
- ▶ Indicators covering the four principles of the Welfare Quality® framework in 34 farms across the dairy cow, suckler cow and veal sectors. The influence of various farming variables and practices, including CAP Strategic Plan interventions, was assessed for each selected animal welfare indicator. Statistical analyses were carried out using RStudio software, applying, depending on the nature of the data, the following tests: Shapiro–Wilk, Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney, Kruskal–Wallis, post hoc tests, as well as Spearman and Pearson correlation tests.

Methodological limitations

The evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan faced several data-related limitations, which constrained both comparisons over time and the analysis of impacts on animal welfare:

- ▶ **Limited comparability between the 2014–2022 and 2023–2027 programming periods:** Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), implementation reports and citizen summaries for the 2014–2022 period present measures at an overly aggregated level, with scopes and objectives that were redesigned under the new CAP. This limits the comparability of amounts, beneficiaries and results on a stable and common basis. The “Biosafety and animal welfare in livestock farming” Pact (BBEA Pact), implemented in 2021–2022, is theoretically better targeted, but no public document provides information on the distribution of funding by sector, region or type of investment. For the current programming period, the Annual Performance Reports (APR) for 2023–2024 cover different accounting periods, creating potential comparison biases;
- ▶ **The inability to access the private Boviwell and EBENE databases,** making it impossible to cross-reference animal welfare scores with CAP payments;
- ▶ **Data extracted from the Rural Development Observatory (ODR), which is based on data provided by the Agency for Services and Payments (ASP), and available during the evaluation were not directly suitable for an animal welfare evaluation,** as the datasets provided did not allow the identification of funded operations with an impact on animal welfare;
- ▶ **The limited time horizon of the evaluation,** conducted at an early stage of the programming period, which restricts the ability to objectively assess the impact of the CAP Strategic Plan on animal welfare;
- ▶ **The impossibility of carrying out a comparative analysis at European level,** due to significant differences in the design of animal welfare support schemes across Member States and the low response rate to interview requests addressed to relevant stakeholders.

5. Responses to the evaluation questions

Effectiveness

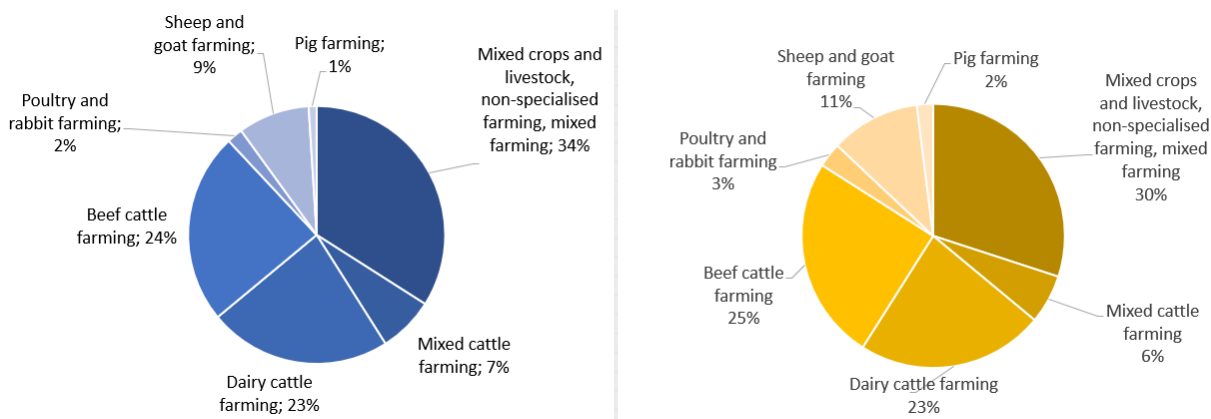
EQ1: To what extent have the CAP Strategic Plan interventions targeted at animal welfare contributed to progress towards the objectives set in terms of animal welfare?

The animal-welfare-targeted interventions of the CAP Strategic Plan have contributed to **tangible but still limited progress** towards the objectives set. In France, approximately 20% of European funding (EUR 9.3 billion) directly or indirectly supports animal welfare, making it possible to initiate improvements, in particular through **on-farm investments** and the development of **organic farming**. These instruments have supported the modernisation of livestock buildings (ventilation, lighting, internal fittings) and the adoption of practices improving certain fundamental animal welfare freedoms, such as access to outdoor areas or reduced stocking density.

However, the overall impact remains difficult to assess, due to the lack of consolidated data at this early stage of the programming period. **The effects observed are highly heterogeneous across sectors and territories.** Ruminant sectors, particularly cattle, are the main beneficiaries, while the pig and poultry sectors have limited access to the schemes, constrained by restrictive eligibility criteria, high investment costs and weak economic valorisation of the efforts undertaken. Regional strategies, which vary significantly from one territory to another, further accentuate these disparities and contribute to a sense of inequality among farmers.

Nevertheless, insufficient funding envelopes per project limit the effectiveness of the support at the livestock system level. In the pork and poultry sectors, the impact of the CSP on animal welfare remains limited and highly uneven. Overall, CSP measures provide a “boost” but do not ensure the long-term viability of production systems: they are temporary, dependent on budgetary allocations, and do not cover structural additional costs.

Figure 1: Distribution of amounts (left) and beneficiaries (right) by sector for animal-welfare-targeted support (eco-scheme, organic farming, AECMs, on-farm investments)



Source: ASP data – EY–ODR processing, 21/11/2025

EQ2: To what extent have CAP Strategic Plan interventions not explicitly designed to improve animal welfare had a positive impact on animal welfare?

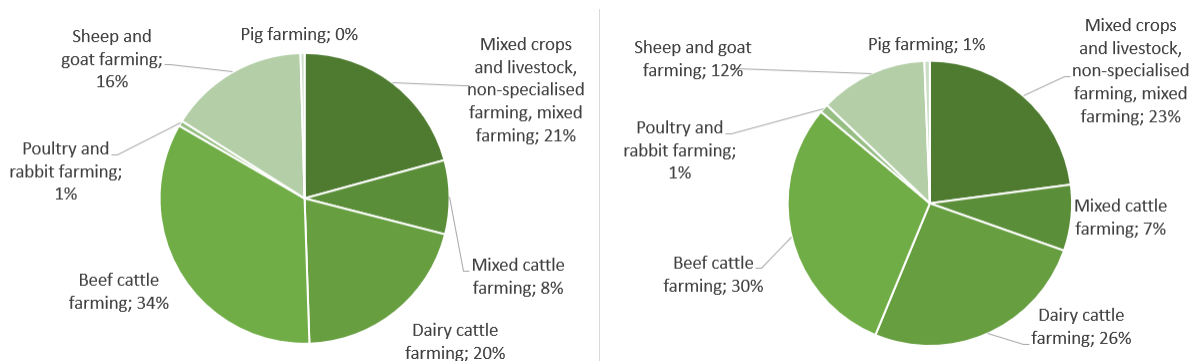
CAP Strategic Plan interventions not specifically dedicated to animal welfare – mainly **coupled support** and **areas facing natural constraints payments (ANC)** – reach a very large number of farms and represent substantial financial amounts, but their positive impact on animal welfare remains **indirect, heterogeneous and often limited**.

These interventions mainly concern **herbivore sectors**, particularly cattle, which receive more than 60% of the amounts distributed. In these sectors, coupled support is primarily perceived as **income support** rather than a lever for improving practices: it is based on criteria related to land areas or animal numbers, without requirements regarding grazing, animal comfort or welfare-enhancing equipment. The only potentially positive effect identified relates to the reduction of transport distances through support for young cattle, which may be favourable to animal welfare; however, this effect could not be measured within the scope of this evaluation.

Overall, the contribution to animal welfare appears **low to moderate**. The link between coupled support and animal welfare is only recognised in a limited number of specific cases.

The ANC scheme presents a **more favourable theoretical potential**, as it supports extensive ruminant systems where grazing and low stocking rates can improve animal behaviour, comfort and health. However, in the absence of criteria explicitly linked to animal welfare and given the sometimes limited clarity of the scheme for beneficiaries, this support is most often perceived as helping to maintain existing practices rather than as an incentive lever for change. The positive impacts observed on animal welfare therefore remain **local and non-systematic**.

Figure 2: Distribution of amounts and beneficiaries by sector for indirectly animal-welfare-targeted support (ANC and coupled support)



Source: ASP data – EY–ODR processing, 21/11/2025

EQ3: To what extent has animal welfare improved in mainland France and in the French outermost regions (ORs)?

At this stage of the programming period, **it is not possible to objectively establish a significant improvement in animal welfare in mainland France or in the French outermost regions**. The link between CAP Strategic Plan interventions and changes in animal welfare is perceived as **indirect, variable across sectors** and often difficult for farmers to identify. On-farm productive investment support is considered the most effective in promoting animal welfare, but its overall effect remains **partial and heterogeneous**.

Animal-welfare-targeted support has benefited **143,077 farms**, with **EUR 2.749 billion disbursed**, suggesting a dynamic of support, but no objective measurement of changes in animal welfare is currently available. Improvements reported in mainland France mainly stem from **on-farm productive investments**, widely recognised by stakeholders as the most effective interventions, including the modernisation of livestock buildings, increased access to outdoor areas, improved lighting and reduced stocking density. These effects were observed in the case studies, notably in veal production (100% of beneficiary farmers) and in dairy farming.

In the **outermost regions**, structural and climatic constraints make the implementation of animal-welfare actions more complex. Despite non-negligible amounts of funding, although significantly lower than in mainland France (approximately **EUR 201 million** disbursed to **35,258 farms**), the ability to assess changes in animal welfare remains very limited.

In summary, available data point to **local but non-generalisable improvements**, mainly concentrated in mainland France and Corsica and linked to specific instruments, without allowing conclusions to be drawn regarding an overall improvement in animal welfare.

Efficiency

EQ4: Are the interventions designed to address the need to improve animal welfare efficient in achieving improvements in animal welfare?

The efficiency of interventions specifically designed to improve animal welfare remains difficult to establish, due to the lack of consolidated data for the 2023–2027 programming period. The analysis, focused on 2024 and based on the national animal welfare evaluation data available at this stage, allows only a partial observation of measurable effects. Available information indicates that actual efficiency is **strongly constrained by economic, administrative and territorial barriers**, resulting in heterogeneous implementation across regions.

The resources mobilized at this stage are **currently insufficient to cover the full range of needs**. Animal-welfare-targeted support, although backed by significant budgets, does not compensate for the costs of the investments required. In accordance with European regulations, these schemes are designed to co-finance projects rather than to cover their entire cost. Uncertainty regarding future income, input price volatility and shortcomings in support for organic farming further limit farmers' ability to engage sustainably in animal-welfare-enhancing practices. Some schemes are considered **weakly incentive-based**, particularly as the duration and effective levels of support reduce their leverage effect. For example, support granted to organic farming is often perceived as financially insufficient and poorly aligned with market conditions in an inflationary food context.

Operators consider procedures to be inappropriate, selection criteria insufficiently transparent and support mechanisms inadequate, while beneficiaries perceive the aid as weakly incentive-based, sometimes withdraw from schemes and largely lack support, thereby limiting overall efficiency. Aid amounts received by beneficiaries of measures directly targeted at animal welfare (European funds only) vary widely between regions, ranging from EUR 3,550 in Hauts-de-France to EUR 9,784 in Provence–Alpes–Côte d'Azur, notably due to regional economic contexts and farm size. This heterogeneity nevertheless raises questions regarding efficiency: depending on the area, it may create both inequalities in incentives and windfall effects.

EQ5: Do the practice changes promoted by the CAP Strategic Plan in terms of animal welfare, together with further CSP support, allow farms to remain economically efficient?

Practice changes promoted by the CAP Strategic Plan in relation to animal welfare, as well as the associated support, **do not systematically guarantee the maintenance of farms' economic efficiency**. Their impact varies significantly across sectors and depends strongly on the economic context. Initial analyses indicate

that, despite substantial levels of financial support, the practices promoted (reduced stocking density, outdoor access, modernisation) generate additional costs in a market that offers limited valorisation of these efforts, thereby constraining profitability for many farms. In certain sectors, such as organic dairy farming, CAP Strategic Plan support strongly conditions economic results, while in others (pig farming, suckler cow-calf systems), costs may exceed sale prices, even when support is taken into account.

Practice changes appear to be driven more by economic conditions than by the incentive effect of support measures. The **overall economic context**, marked by inflation, international competition and heightened price sensitivity, reduces the capacity to valorise products derived from animal-welfare-enhancing practices. CAP Strategic Plan support proves insufficient to offset the decline in consumption and market outlets for organic products caused by the economic downturn. **Consumption trends** also weigh heavily: demand for differentiated products remains limited, thereby weakening the profitability of committed production systems.

While some animal-welfare-related practices may generate productivity gains, these remain sector-specific and do not always compensate for rising costs. Moreover, the high dependence of many farms on public support highlights that such aid is essential to maintaining economic balance but is not sufficient, in its current form, to ensure sustainable economic efficiency across all farms. Farms are therefore required to reconcile three major challenges: improving animal welfare, maintaining economic viability and remaining competitive on the market.

Relevance

EQ6: Are the choices made in the French CAP Strategic Plan regarding animal-welfare-targeted measures (animal welfare AECMs, organic farming, eco-schemes and on-farm investments) relevant with regard to Objective OS-I of the CAP Strategic Plan?

The choices made in the French CAP Strategic Plan regarding animal-welfare-targeted measures, namely animal welfare AECMs, organic farming, eco-schemes and on-farm investments, **appear overall relevant with regard to Objective OS-I**, in particular the objective aimed at supporting changes in practices and production systems. However, **a gap exists between the strategic intention to support change and the actual changes in practices observed on the ground**. This gap is further analysed under EQ11.

Objective OS-I of the CAP Strategic Plan: Societal requirements

The specific objective “**OS-I – Societal requirements**” of the CAP Strategic Plan aims to improve the way European Union agriculture responds to societal expectations in relation to food and health. It is translated into five national needs defined in the 2023–2027 CAP Strategic Plan, including Need I.2: “Supporting changes in agricultural practices and production systems”.

More specifically, **animal welfare AECMs** for monogastric sectors are consistent with this objective by promoting de-intensification and access to outdoor areas, while the “forage autonomy” measure primarily addresses economic and environmental objectives rather than animal welfare in the strict sense. **Support for conversion to and maintenance of organic farming**, as well as the **eco-scheme**, are particularly well aligned with Objective OS-I, as they involve structural changes (reduced stocking density, outdoor access) and enhance transparency for consumers. Finally, **on-farm investments** are essential for modernising livestock buildings and improving animal comfort, although their impact depends on eligibility criteria and the nature of the projects financed.

Despite the overall alignment between CAP Strategic Plan objectives and animal welfare, the concrete design and targeting modalities of animal-welfare-targeted measures limit their reach. CAP interventions most often contribute indirectly to animal welfare, notably by supporting existing practices or systems, without always providing a sufficiently strong incentive to address the specific needs of certain sectors. This limitation is particularly evident in the poultry and pig sectors, for which few schemes are available at regional level and which do not benefit from coupled support.

EQ7: To what extent are the animal-welfare related interventions of the National Strategic Plan relevant with regard to the four animal-welfare quality principles (Welfare Quality Framework)?

The four animal welfare quality principles (Welfare Quality®)

The four animal welfare quality principles are:

- Appropriate feeding
- Good health
- Good housing conditions
- Appropriate animal behaviour

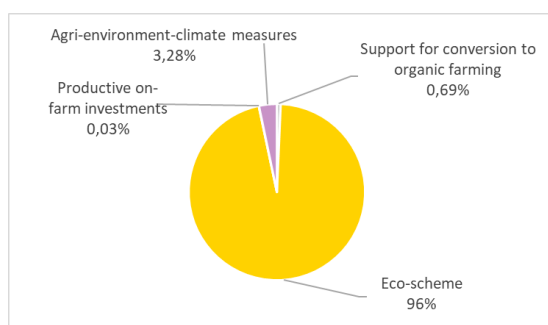
CAP Strategic Plan interventions show **variable relevance with regard to the four principles of the Welfare Quality® framework.**

Measures related to organic farming (70.01 to 70.05) and the eco-scheme (31.01) are the most consistent with these principles: they require access to outdoor areas, reduced stocking densities and the regulation of painful practices, thereby clearly addressing the principles of appropriate feeding, good housing conditions and appropriate behaviour. Moreover, **eco-scheme measures**

mobilise the vast majority of funds targeted at animal welfare, accounting for 96% of such funding.

Support measures for organic farming, the animal welfare AECM for monogastric sectors and on-farm investments are also considered relevant with regard to the **principle of good housing conditions**. The animal welfare AECM for monogastric sectors (within intervention 70.09) promotes reduced stocking rates and access to outdoor areas, thereby improving animal comfort. Productive on-farm investments (73.01 and 73.09) may, for certain types of investment, improve ventilation, lighting, cubicle comfort and access to outdoor areas. Finally, all the measures analysed contribute to the **principle of appropriate animal behaviour**, albeit in varying and often incomplete ways.

Figure 3: Share of European funds committed to measures directly targeted at animal welfare, by measure



Source: ASP data, EY–ODR processing, November 2025

Nevertheless, establishing a clear link between CAP support and specific farming practices remains difficult, according to the case studies conducted.

Coherence

EQ8: Are the CAP Strategic Plan interventions coherent with one another with regard to improving animal welfare?

CAP Strategic Plan interventions appear overall **coherent with one another** in contributing to improvements in animal welfare, insofar as they share convergent objectives: supporting competitiveness, promoting sustainable practices and protecting the environment, while also integrating measures explicitly targeting animal welfare. Certain interventions, such as organic farming and on-farm investments, are articulated in a relatively harmonious manner with animal welfare principles and tend to reinforce each other's effects.

However, some **inconsistencies** persist. These relate, on the one hand, to the content of certain AECMs, which do not cover all dimensions of animal welfare and instead prioritise indirect levers (feeding, stocking rates, agri-environmental practices), and, on the other hand, to implementation modalities marked by differentiated regional policy choices that limit the availability or accessibility of schemes in certain territories. In addition, the lack of consolidated data prevents a full assessment of coherence between resources mobilised and final objectives. The European Commission also highlighted in 2022 an **initial shortfall in measures specifically oriented towards animal welfare**, notably with regard to certain sensitive practices (tail docking, confinement, alternatives to mutilations), revealing a gap between stated ambitions and operational implementation.

The legacy of the 2014–2020 programming period constitutes another source of tension: the absence in France of a dedicated animal welfare measure and the limited presence of specific measures in Rural Development Programmes constrained the baseline on which the CAP Strategic Plan could build. In addition, regional disparities, such as the exclusion of certain legal forms or the ineligibility of specific AECMs

resulting from region-specific implementation choices, generate territorial inconsistencies in access to support for farmers, regardless of their practices or their potential contribution to animal welfare. In Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Bretagne, certain legal forms, such as SCEAs, are excluded from eligibility for subsidies.

Despite these limitations, stakeholders interviewed consider that CAP Strategic Plan interventions overall contribute to improved livestock farming practices, notably through modernised infrastructure and technologies.

EQ9: Has CAP Strategic Plan support built on or replaced the actions implemented under the Recovery Plan through the ‘Biosafety and animal welfare in livestock farming’ Pact implemented in 2021 and 2022?

Animal-welfare-targeted CAP Strategic Plan interventions are **largely in continuity with the measures implemented under the BBEA Pact** in terms of objectives and scope, but they differ with regard to the types of activities supported and the amounts allocated. The CAP Strategic Plan seeks to establish a more comprehensive strategy that goes beyond material investments by promoting more autonomous systems and sustainable practices tailored to territorial specificities. This represents a significant step forward compared with the support previously provided under the BBEA Pact, particularly through the impact of CAP Strategic Plan measures on the transition of livestock practices towards organic farming, productive on-farm investment and access to outdoor areas.

Overall, **strategic coherence between the CAP Strategic Plan and the BBEA Pact** appears to be established. While some variations exist, objectives, types of support and sectoral coverage remain broadly consistent between the two frameworks. **However, the CAP Strategic Plan does not cover, or only marginally addresses, several important measures included in the 2016–2020 national animal welfare strategy**, such as those relating to animal transport and slaughter conditions and procedures.

The 2023–2027 CAP Strategic Plan marks a scaling-up of animal welfare considerations compared with the previous programming period, with unprecedented levels of funding, in contrast to 2014–2020, during which few regions implemented dedicated animal welfare measures.

EQ10: Does the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan demonstrate coherence of action with non-CAP policies aimed at improving animal welfare?

The implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan shows **limited coherence of action** with public policies outside the CAP framework. CAP Strategic Plan measures in favour of animal welfare are broadly aligned with the 2016–2020 national strategy, particularly with regard to changes in livestock farming practices and the prevention of animal mistreatment. Furthermore, tensions exist between the objectives pursued by the CAP Strategic Plan and certain non-CAP policies, notably in the field of international trade agreements. These agreements constitute a structuring context that lies outside the scope of action of the CAP Strategic Plan and may conflict with European animal welfare requirements, without the CAP Strategic Plan having direct levers to ensure coherence, as these policies fall under distinct European competences. The EU–Mercosur agreement illustrates these tensions, due to animal welfare regulatory and control standards perceived as lower than European standards, weaknesses in traceability, and risks of competitive distortion that may undermine the efforts required of European farmers.

Finally, significant advances in animal welfare are sometimes driven by private initiatives, such as commitments by certain sectors or retailers (for example, the European Chicken Commitment). While these initiatives can contribute concretely to improving animal welfare, they are based on voluntary and economic logics. They do not constitute public policies and are not subject to formal coordination mechanisms with the CAP Strategic Plan, which currently limits a fully integrated animal welfare approach across the value chain.

EU added value

EQ11: To what extent do farms receiving EU funds through animal-welfare-targeted CAP Strategic Plan support guarantee a higher level of animal welfare than farms that do not receive such support?

Until now, although animal-welfare-targeted CAP Strategic Plan support may help finance certain investments, its impact in terms of a genuine improvement in animal welfare compared with non-beneficiary

farms remains **uncertain and uneven**. The actual impact of support on changes in practices is **uncertain, uneven and difficult to disentangle** from dynamics external to the CAP. The most notable advances observed across sectors—such as the end of the sale of eggs from caged hens, welfare audits and private commitments—stem primarily from initiatives led by **retailers, sectors or NGOs**, independently of CAP Strategic Plan support.

Animal-welfare measures under the CAP Strategic Plan also face **structural and operational challenges**: financial incentives perceived as insufficient, limited targeting, low ceilings for on-farm investments, and support strategies that are not well adapted. Farmers interviewed often perceive these measures as constraints rather than as sufficiently incentive-based levers capable of transforming their practices.

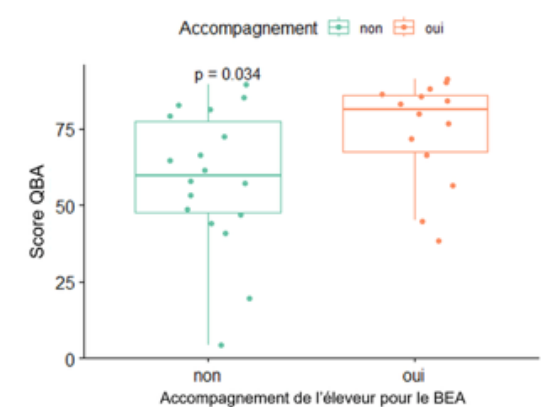
In addition, qualitative evidence suggests that CAP animal-welfare support can lead to positive animal welfare improvements on some farms, but it **lacks both incentive power and precise targeting**, limiting its ability to systematically induce practice changes. Many practices that go beyond regulatory requirements result from **individual initiatives** and specific economic or societal motivations, without a direct link to CAP Strategic Plan support. Enrichments or improvements observed in the goat and dairy sectors are mostly financed through farmers' own funds rather than through animal-welfare schemes.

Consequently, while support may facilitate certain investments and prevent some farms from abandoning planned improvements, **it does not currently allow a clear distinction to be made in favour of beneficiary farms in terms of higher animal welfare levels**. Observed improvements appear to be driven more by private, regulatory or sectoral dynamics than by the direct effect of CAP Strategic Plan support.

EQ12: Do farmers receiving CAP support demonstrate a better understanding of animal welfare?

At this stage of the programming period, it is not possible to conclude that farmers receiving CAP support demonstrate a better understanding of animal welfare than those who do not. Access to CAP Strategic Plan support is not a key determinant of interest in animal welfare, which appears to be more closely linked to **individual commitment**, the regulatory framework or private standards. Beneficiaries state that their concern for animal welfare is **“totally independent of the support they receive”**, and many struggle to understand the link between animal welfare and the CAP.

Figure 4: QBA scores of farms



Source: Analysis of observations conducted on cattle farms (suckler, dairy and veal)

Although farmers self-assess as well informed (median score 4/5), a significant share are **unable to answer questions** relating to changes in animal welfare or the economic impact of support. This suggests perceived knowledge but **limited operational understanding**.

There is also a **lack of awareness** of CAP Strategic Plan animal-welfare interventions among beneficiaries, managing authorities and measure facilitators alike. A recurring point is the lack of tailored support and specific training, with farmers being insufficiently informed about both investment schemes and animal-welfare measures falling under the CAP.

Finally, while case-study analysis shows that technical support can improve certain animal welfare indicators—such as Qualitative Behavioural Assessment (QBA) scores, a tool used to assess animal emotional welfare—this does not allow the conclusion that CAP beneficiaries understand animal welfare better. The link appears

indirect and non-systematic.

EQ13: Is indicator R.44 effectively designed to measure the impact of the CAP Strategic Plan on animal welfare?

Indicator R.44, as designed in European regulations, is a result indicator and appears **partially relevant but largely insufficient** to measure the actual impact of interventions on animal welfare. As a result indicator, its design is based on monitoring the number of livestock units (LSU) covered by animal-welfare-targeted measures, which makes it possible to track the **uptake of support**, but not the concrete effects on farming conditions. The indicator relies exclusively on financial data and does not

measure either the quality of practices implemented or their outcomes in terms of animal welfare. As such, it does not allow an assessment of the efficiency of investments made, nor does it capture the diversity of situations across farms.

The indicator is therefore considered to be more suitable for monitoring the use of support. NGOs, experts and farmers regard it as ill-suited to measuring actual improvements in animal welfare; many are even unaware of its existence, including among the authorities responsible for reporting it.

Finally, the recent decline in organic farming and the reduction in the livestock populations concerned limit the achievement of the targets set, further weakening the indicator’s ability to reflect animal welfare trends. Indicator R.44 thus appears to be a useful tool for tracking engagement with support schemes, but **ineffective for measuring the impact of the CAP Strategic Plan on animal welfare**, calling for complementary indicators based on direct observation of practices and animals.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the theoretical relevance of CAP Strategic Plan measures for animal welfare, their impact remains limited by insufficient operational adaptation, significant regional disparities and inadequate financial resources. Improvements in animal welfare take place in a context marked by rising costs for farmers, limited economic valorisation of efforts undertaken, and inappropriate monitoring tools, calling for stronger coordination, more targeted animal-welfare criteria and enhanced multi-stakeholder dialogue. These findings provide the direct basis for the recommendations set out below.

Recommendation 1: Ensure territorial equity in access to animal-welfare measures, taking account of regional specificities

Implementation actions:

- ▶ **Improve existing coordination** between regions to make animal welfare a cross-cutting objective of agricultural policy: strengthen regular State–Region dialogue and establish shared milestones, so that animal welfare is systematically integrated into the design, targeting and evaluation of all agricultural schemes;
- ▶ Appoint a **national animal-welfare focal point**, responsible for ensuring coordination between regions and guaranteeing coherent and equitable implementation of schemes across the entire territory;
- ▶ **Launch a co-construction process with under-represented sectors** to adapt and calibrate animal-welfare schemes (investments, animal-welfare AECMs) to the specific characteristics of monogastric and rabbit sectors.

Stakeholders: Regional administrations and sectoral organizations

Implementation difficulty: Low

Performance impact: High

Financial impact: Low

Proposed timeline: Short / Medium term

Recommendation 2: Improve and strengthen training and support

Implementation actions:

- ▶ **Develop a modular animal welfare training offer by sector**, combining on-farm practical sessions, peer-to-peer experience sharing and short “animal welfare essentials” modules;
- ▶ **Assess the effectiveness of training and support** through systematic participant feedback and simple indicators of practice uptake;
- ▶ Develop a **specific training offer dedicated to the preparation of support applications** for measures directly targeted at animal welfare;
- ▶ **Map public and private good practices** related to animal welfare.

Stakeholders: Central administration (DGAL), regional Managing Authorities, as well as other regional actors, notably Chambers of Agriculture, DRAAFs and advisory/training networks

Implementation difficulty: Low	Performance impact: Medium
Financial impact: Low	Proposed timeline: Short term

Recommendation 3: Strengthen existing indicators for the 2028 programming period by introducing impact indicators based on animal welfare, following the Welfare Quality® methodology

Implementation actions:

- ▶ **Extend the scope of indicator R.44**, or any other animal-welfare-related indicator, **to all sectors**, using a Member State-level consolidation method (for example, including monogastric sectors);
- ▶ **Conduct EU-level animal welfare studies based on the Welfare Quality® methodology**, which relies on physiological, health and behavioural characteristics to assess animal welfare at farm level;
- ▶ **Publish results annually** and organise a European review process to adjust schemes accordingly.

Stakeholders: European Commission

Implementation difficulty: High	Performance impact: High
Financial impact: Medium	Proposed timeline: Long term (2028 programming period)

Recommendation 4: Strengthen, for the 2028 programming period, the incentive effect and targeting of animal-welfare support through an adaptation of eligibility criteria

Implementation actions:

- ▶ **Recalibrate schemes** to strengthen their incentive effect (rates / budgets):
 - Re-examine the allocation of funding within AECMs to increase the share dedicated to measures that most directly contribute to animal welfare, for example by reassessing the relative weight of the forage self-sufficiency AECM, while maintaining consistency with the objectives pursued by existing AECMs;
 - Reassess area-based compensation levels for animal-welfare AECMs targeting monogastric sectors.
- ▶ **Remove access barriers** and strengthen the leverage effect of *on-farm* animal-welfare investments:
 - Differentiate aid ceilings and eligibility thresholds for on-farm investments that directly improve animal welfare;
 - Adjust eligibility parameters by sector and production system type, taking into account technical and sanitary constraints as well as farm size.
- ▶ **Update sector-specific guidance documents and application notes** to clarify eligibility criteria, secure administrative processing and make expected levels of commitment explicit.

Stakeholders: Central administration (DGPE and DGAL) and regional Managing Authorities, with support from expert bodies such as the National Animal Welfare Reference Centre (CNR BEA)

Implementation difficulty: High	Performance impact: High
Financial impact: High	Proposed timeline: Long term (2028 programming period)