From Indicators to Implementation:

Pathways for EU Welfare Reform

Policy Workshop - Report

14 JANUARY 2026 | 12:30–17:00 CET

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Animal Welfare Indicators (AWIs) are scientific tools that translate evidence on animal well-being into measurable outcomes for policy, enforcement, and improvement. Within the framework of the aWISH project, AWIs are being validated for use at slaughterhouses across the EU, providing a foundation for harmonised welfare assessment.

The first aWISH policy workshop, "Minimum Standards and Beyond – Policy Pathways for Animal-Based Indicators under EU Welfare Reform", brought together experts from the European Commission, academia, NGOs, industry and veterinary authorities within and outside of the EU to discuss how AWIs can complement legal standards. Participants agreed that AWIs are vital for assessing real welfare outcomes but cannot replace strong legislation. To be effective, AWIs must be embedded within clear minimum standards that ban inherently poor systems and enable evidence-based monitoring of compliance and progress.

This report outlines practical pathways for integrating AWIs into EU frameworks. It highlights how indicators can be embedded through existing mechanisms such as species-specific legislation, the Official Controls Regulation, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), welfare labelling, and trade standards. It also underscores the growing importance of digitalisation, demonstrating how the aWISH project's technological innovations can support large-scale, consistent welfare monitoring.

Italy's ClassyFarm system is presented as a working model of integration, combining welfare monitoring, incentive schemes, and data transparency within a unified digital platform. It offers proof that outcome-based welfare governance is both achievable and scalable.

Looking ahead, the report identifies priorities for the European Commission and Member States. Specifically, harmonising definitions and thresholds, strengthening data governance, and embedding validated AWIs within new legislation and CAP interventions. By aligning science, policy, and practice, the EU can ensure that AWIs become not only a tool for measurement but also a driver of meaningful welfare improvement, ensuring implementation and full use of the revised minimum EU animal welfare legal standards.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This briefing was prepared before the second aWISH (Animal Welfare Indicators at the Slaughter House) policy workshop to consolidate key insights and outline next steps for integrating animal welfare indicators (AWIs) into EU policy and legislation. Building on the first workshop's discussions, it explores how AWIs can translate scientific evidence into enforceable, outcome-based welfare standards.

The paper positions AWIs as essential tools for monitoring and improving welfare, while recognising that they must operate within strong legal frameworks that set clear minimum standards. It also examines how the European Commission and Member States can share responsibility for implementation, drawing on existing legislative models and national examples. Therefore, this paper aims to inform the ongoing dialogue between the European Commission, Member States, and stakeholders on how validated indicators can be effectively implemented within the EU's evolving animal welfare legislative landscape.

2. ABOUT THE AWISH PROJECT

The aWISH project (Animal Welfare Indicators at the Slaughter House) is an EU-funded Horizon Europe initiative that aims to develop ways to measure animal-based welfare indicators across Member States. Focusing on pigs and broilers, aWISH works with slaughterhouses, competent authorities, and research institutions to generate reliable welfare data that can inform monitoring, enforcement, and policy development. Its findings help demonstrate how animal-based indicators can be applied consistently across diverse systems and translated into practical tools for welfare improvement.

3. ABOUT THE AWISH PROJECT

On September 5th, 2025, aWISH hosted its first online policy workshop, 'Minimum Standards and Beyond – Policy Pathways for Animal-Based Indicators under EU Welfare Reform'. The workshop brought together members from the European Commission, academia and research, NGOs, industry and veterinary authorities to discuss the role of AWIs in the EU Welfare Reform.

The discussion focused on how AWIs can complement legal standards by providing measurable welfare outcomes, rather than solely relying on resource- or management-based inputs. Speakers from across sectors shared experiences from Member States and EU-level initiatives, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges of embedding AWIs into legislation, assurance schemes, financing schemes and monitoring systems.

Key themes included the need for standardisation, harmonisation across Member States, and ensuring that indicators serve as tools for enforcement and improvement, rather than as substitutes for strong legal baselines. The workshop's conclusions provide the foundation for this report, which explores how these ideas can be translated into practical policy action.

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4. ROLE OF AWIS IN LEGISLATION AND POLICY

Animal Welfare Indicators (AWIs) are scientific measures that reflect the well-being of animals. By quantifying aspects of an animal's health, behaviour and environment, AWIs translate complex scientific welfare knowledge into practical, policy-relevant outcomes. These tools offer a way to move beyond structural or procedural requirements, towards an evidence-based understanding of how animals experience their environment. They can also help increase the efficiency of the resources available, specifically when it comes to the national authorities.

4.1 TYPES OF AWIS

Animal-Based Indicators (ABIs) are direct measures of the animal's physical condition, health, and behaviour. For example, injuries, signs of disease, growth rates, expression of species-specific behaviours, abnormal behaviours, and physiological stress markers. Animal-based indicators concern an animal's actual state and experiences.

Resource-based indicators (RBIs) are concerned with the environmental resources provided to an animal. For example, the housing system used, the ventilation, the lighting, and the presence and type of substrates.

Management-based indicators (MBIs) relate to the practices and procedures used to care for and handle an animal. For example, feeding regimes, health monitoring, biosecurity, handling methods, record keeping, and staff training. They assess how well the management supports animal welfare.

While all three types contribute to welfare assessment, animal-based indicators are the most meaningful, since they describe what animals experience, rather than what is provided to them. In contrast, RBI and MBIs are input measures that reflect what is provided to an animal in terms of his or her environment and husbandry. Whilst these can represent both risks and opportunities for welfare, they remain indirect measures, capturing potential rather than realised welfare outcomes. Nevertheless, RBIs are the easiest to collect as they are usually less dynamic, staying stable for longer on a farm.

4.2 AWIs as tools – Not solutions

Animal Welfare Indicators are powerful tools for evaluating welfare outcomes, but they are not substitutes for strong legal standards. Indicators can reveal whether animals are thriving or suffering, but they cannot correct practices that are fundamentally incompatible with good welfare. Without clear minimum requirements in law, AWIs risk becoming a monitoring tool for poor conditions rather than a driver of improvement.

To be effective, AWIs must operate with a legislative framework that bans inherently cruel systems and practices and sets meaningful minimum standards. This means phasing out or prohibiting systems that cannot deliver acceptable welfare outcomes, such as cages, fast-growing broilers, and mutilations.

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Once such practices are addressed through legislation, AWIs can serve their intended purpose: monitoring progress, verifying compliance, and promoting continuous improvement. This will then allow policymakers and producers to measure whether the legislation results in improved welfare for animals, transforming policy goals into measurable outcomes. This perspective reflected a shared view among participants at the first aWISH workshop, who stressed that indicators can only be effective if embedded within ambitious legal reform.

5. INTEGRATING AND IMPLEMENTING AWI's ACROSS EU POLICY CHANNELS

Building on discussions from the first policy workshop, this section outlines how AWIs can be systematically integrated into EU policy frameworks.

Integrating AWIs into EU legislation and policy requires careful coordination between the European Commission and Member States. While the Commission sets the overarching legal standards and objectives, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement largely rest with national authorities. AWIs can support this dynamic by serving as a bridge between EU ambition and national delivery, aligning science, policy and enforcement.

Discussions in the first aWISH policy workshop highlighted that this balance is central to making AWIs effective. Participants emphasised that indicators must be harmonised enough to ensure comparability across Member States, but flexible enough to reflect national contexts and production systems. The European Commission and its bodies, such as the European Reference Centres for Animal Welfare, can play a role in this standardisation across Member States through training, resources and clarifications. As Andrea Gavinelli from the European Commission noted, this balance is essential to maintain both internal consistency and external credibility in trade.

5.1 THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

At the EU level, the Commission can embed AWIs through several legal and policy channels:

Animal Welfare Legislation and the Official Controls Regulation:
AWIs can be directly referenced within species-specific directives and integrated into the Official Controls Regulation framework to guide inspections and risk-based enforcement. This would strengthen the legal backbone of existing requirements, moving beyond resource-based checks to outcome-based monitoring.

Examples of this already in place include the Broiler Directive (2007/43/EC) and the Laying Hens Directive (1999/74/EC), which include requirements for recording animal-based indicators such as footpad dermatitis and mortality.

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Although their application remains uneven across Member States, as there are differences in how Member States define, measure, and report them, resulting in fragmented datasets and limited EU-wide comparability. This inconsistency weakens the potential for EU-level benchmarking and enforcement.

Data ownership adds a further layer of complexity. With welfare data collected under differing mandates by private operators, assurance schemes, or national authorities, access and reuse for policy evaluation remain uncertain. Concerns around confidentiality and commercial sensitivity often limit transparency, even where data are publicly relevant. Therefore, an EU-level framework on data governance is essential to ensure transparency, comparability, and responsible sharing across Member States.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP):
AWIs can be tied to both conditionality and the animal welfare interventions within CAP Strategic Plans, ensuring that public funds reward measurable outcomes. Conditionality already ties CAP payments to compliance with basic welfare legislation, but AWIs could make this process more objective by providing outcome-based evidence of compliance. At the same time, welfare interventions under national CAP plans could use AWIs to incentivise higher welfare standards beyond the legal minimum.

For example, in the first aWISH policy workshop, Dr Francesca Fusi described how several Italian regions have introduced new CAP funding rules that are linked to animal welfare outcomes. These incentive policies enable measurable improvement while awaiting legislative reform, allowing farmers to be refunded based on quantifiable welfare outcomes and performance (see Section 5.3.1).

Labelling and Trade Integration:
Animal welfare indicators can also serve as a scientific foundation for credible labelling and import standards. Several Member States, including Germany, France, and Denmark, already use outcome-based welfare criteria in national labelling schemes, reflecting both feasibility and consumer demand for transparency. As discussed in the first workshop and confirmed by the Commission's 2022 study on animal welfare labelling, citizens want trustworthy information on how animals are kept. However, credibility depends on the use of measurable and harmonised animal-based indicators.

In trade policy, indicator-based welfare standards can be WTO-compatible, providing a transparent and non-discriminatory way to verify equivalence for imported animal products. By grounding trade requirements in measurable animal welfare outcomes, the EU can uphold its welfare expectations while ensuring fair competition for producers.

Together, welfare-based labelling and trade standards would create a coherent system that rewards higher welfare, strengthens consumer trust, and reinforces the EU's leadership in science-based animal policy.

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Digitalisation and Data Infrastructure:
Automation, sensors and digital platforms can make welfare monitoring more efficient, consistent, and scalable across the EU. Harmonised digital reporting systems would support both enforcement and progressive enhancement, while reducing administrative burden for farmers and inspectors.

Projects like aWISH show how automated systems can collect and analyse AWI data at slaughterhouses, creating real-time feedback loops between farms, inspectors and policymakers. By validating technologies that detect welfare indicators such as tail and skin lesions, footpad dermatitis, hock burns and stress vocalisations, aWISH demonstrates that digital tools can generate reliable standardised welfare data across Member States and production systems. These automated observations feed into a central data platform that enables trend analysis, benchmarking and targeted feedback to producers.

In practice, this means that slaughterhouse-level findings can be used to identify recurring welfare problems at the farm level, support enforcement decisions by competent authorities, and inform EU-wide policy evaluation. Digital solutions also enable Member States to target enforcement resources more efficiently, aligning welfare oversight with risk-based principles under the Official Controls Regulation.

5.2 THE ROLE OF MEMBER STATES

Member States are responsible for operationalising these indicators, deciding who collects the data (official veterinarians, private auditors, or automated systems), how it is verified, and how it informs enforcement or improvement plans. Therefore, clear EU guidance is essential to support consistent data collection and interpretation without undermining national flexibility.

The aWISH project provides a working model for this integration. By validating animal-based indicators across several Member States, it offers a harmonised scientific foundation to support both EU-level design and national implementation. Findings from the project so far confirm that AWIs are feasible and repeatable and generate comparable welfare data across diverse production systems.

5.3 A COHESIVE FRAMEWORK

Going forward, the Commission should ensure standardisation, comparability, and guidance, while Member States focus on implementation, enforcement, and innovation. A shared framework for indicator definitions, data collection, and reporting, supported by an EU-level platform and common guidance, would reduce current fragmentation and enable results to be compared and aggregated across countries. Together, these efforts can create a cohesive EU system in which animal-based indicators not only measure welfare but also actively drive it across EU legislation, CAP funding, trade policy, and data management, also ensuring alignment in all legal fronts.

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As the aWISH project shows, harmonised indicator frameworks can turn research into regulation-ready tools. The next step is to draw lessons from existing national systems that already integrate AWIs into legislation or policy, to demonstrate how EU-wide implementation can be achieved in practice.

Italy's approach to turning indicators into action:
Italy offers one of the most advanced national models for integrating AWIs into both regulatory oversight and incentive policy. As described by Dr Francesca Fusi (IZSLER) during the first aWISH workshop, the Italian Ministry of Health, through regional authorities and public institutes, operates a national digital platform, [ClassyFarm](#), that consolidates data from on-farm assessments, veterinary inspections, and laboratory results. This unified system continuously monitors welfare status in near real time, using automated risk-categorisation algorithms to prioritise farms for official controls and improve the efficiency of animal welfare inspections.

By combining multiple data streams, ClassyFarm also facilitates communication and feedback loops between farmers, veterinarians, and authorities, supporting transparency and continuous improvement. Since 2020, Italy has used these data to inform official inspections and to design CAP animal-welfare interventions within regional Strategic Plans. Farms demonstrating measurable welfare improvements are eligible for financial support or refunds linked directly to their indicator results. This performance-based approach rewards progress rather than paperwork and provides national authorities with a transparent evidence base for prioritising inspections. ClassyFarm is widely recognised as a pioneering example of digital innovation in animal welfare governance, demonstrating how data systems can enable outcome-based enforcement at scale.

Italy is also piloting labelling initiatives built on AWIs, ensuring that products entering welfare-label schemes meet minimum welfare thresholds verified through the same platform. The combined use of monitoring, incentives, and labelling demonstrates how AWIs can operate simultaneously as a compliance tool, a policy feedback mechanism, and a market driver.

The Italian experience illustrates how Member States can embed AWIs within existing administrative frameworks while retaining flexibility over delivery. It shows that robust data governance, clear protocols for veterinary assessors, and cooperation between public authorities and farmers are prerequisites for success. Furthermore, it provides a proof-of-concept for scaling up indicator-based welfare governance for the wider EU.

6. LOOKING AHEAD: FROM VALIDATION TO POLICY APPLICATION

The aWISH project demonstrates that animal-based indicators can move from research to real-world regulation. The project's validation work provides a harmonised foundation for monitoring welfare outcomes across Member States. At the same time, its digital innovations show how large-scale data can inform policy decisions in real time.

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The next phase of this work will focus on translating these validated indicators into regulatory practice. This requires alignment between science, legislation, and data governance. The European Commission can lead on standard-setting and cross-border comparability, while Member States focus on enforcement, innovation and capacity building.

The second policy workshop from aWISH will build on these foundations, exploring how AWIs can be incorporated into the forthcoming revision of EU animal welfare legislation and future CAP cycles. It will also examine how validated indicators can underpin credible welfare labelling and trade equivalence. By connecting scientific evidence with practical implementation, aWISH contributes to the EU's broader transition towards outcome-based animal welfare governance.

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