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# Perceptions of farm animal welfare and environmental harm from industrial livestock farming among consumers in Ukraine

Survey

October 2026

# Perceptions of farm animal welfare and environmental harm from industrial livestock farming among consumers in Ukraine

Sociological research


**Relevance of the research** **2**
**Research methodology** **4**
**Resume** **5**
**Research results** **7**
1. Society's readiness for animal welfare and environmental protection standards 7
2. High potential for informing society 8
2.1. Environmental impact 9
2.2. Product labelling 9
2.3. Trust in labelling 10
3. Economic capacity of the consumer 10
4. Ukraine's value integration and compliance with EU standards 11
**Mechanisms and scale of financing for a just transition** **12**
1. Why shouldn't the consumer bear all the costs for improved animal welfare? 12
2. Realistic scale of support and funding sources 12
**Conclusions and policy implications** **14**
**Recommendations** **16**

## Relevance of the research

The attitudes of Ukrainian consumers towards improving animal welfare conditions, as well as reducing the negative environmental impacts of animal farming, remain poorly researched. Due to the lack of systematic data, it has even been suggested that improving animal welfare in Ukraine is an idea promoted by politicians, as opposed to something the public itself wants.

This study is to uncover the reality behind this myth, and to provide data that highlights the attitude of Ukrainians to the welfare of farm animals. It also explores the level of desire from the Ukrainian public to implement better welfare standards and transition to environmentally sustainable livestock production. From the experience of European countries, consumer demand is an important component of the success of reforms in these areas.

The need to implement standards for farm animal welfare and the environment is primarily justified by science. In the European Union (EU), it is estimated that the livestock sector accounts for 81% of nitrogen compounds (e.g., nitrates) from agricultural sources entering aquatic ecosystems, as well as 87% of ammonia emissions into the air from agriculture.[1] Focusing on animal welfare, evidence has also made clear the cruelty of keeping animals in cages, citing problems like their inability to move and exhibit natural behaviour as key to their welfare decline.[2] These issues carry critical political weight, as Ukraine works to align its legislation with EU norms, and implement these standards into its agricultural sector.

In the EU, animal welfare standards have long been a mandatory part of state regulation and quality control systems. Today, the EU is focusing on the complete phase-out of cages on industrial farms. In particular, the EU Livestock Strategy, published on 7 July 2026, mandates the publication of legislative proposals on hens, chickens reared for meat, and pigs by the end of 2026, specifically citing a plan to phase-out the use of all cages for hens and crates for pigs.[3]

At the same time, the European Union is considering introducing equivalent import requirements for products from third countries. **Considering that Ukraine is one of the largest exporters of livestock products to the European Union and seeks to increase its share in this market, the implementation of higher standards for kept animals is of strategic importance for Ukraine.**

The improvement of animal welfare standards in the EU could be financially supported by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This policy, the EU's biggest farming policy, features a system of production requirements and standards aimed at promoting the sustainable development of the sector, and achieving climate and environmental goals. This framework encompasses both mandatory statutory management requirements and standards for Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC). **Specifically, compliance with certain animal welfare measures, as well as the Nitrates Directive, is a condition for receiving support payments.**

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[1] Questions and answers on Nitrates Directive Implementation Report (European Commission, 2021)
[2] For example, opinions by the European Food Safety Authority.
[3] Annex to the EU Livestock Strategy of 7 July 2026

One of the oldest EU regulatory acts within the CAP framework is the 1991 Council Nitrate Directive. After more than 30 years of this Directive being in force, the EU has noted improvements in water quality; however, pollution remains excessively high in several regions, particularly those with a high concentration of farm animals. The EU emphasises that more efficient management of animal by-products, such as manure, will help ensure cleaner water while simultaneously lowering costs for farmers. Specifically, better management of the sector's organic fertilisers will reduce reliance on imported mineral fertilisers.[4]

**As part of the negotiation process with the EU, Ukraine has committed to implementing the requirements and standards stipulated by the CAP, some of which are expected to become operational in Ukraine by the end of 2028.**

[4] Nitrates Directive Evaluation (European Commission, 2026)

## Research methodology

This study was conducted between May and June 2026 by the Doka Center research group, at the request of the public non-profit organisations, Ecodia and Eurogroup for Animals. The study was aimed at residents of regional centers of Ukraine and included three parts: a web survey, focus group discussions, and in-depth semi-structured interviews:

- **1,211 respondents** participated in the web survey;
- **27 participants** participated in the three focus groups;
- In-depth interviews were conducted with **21 participants** from 19 regional centers of Ukraine.

The quantitative online survey was conducted using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) method, using a structured questionnaire containing both closed and semi-closed questions.

The qualitative stage of the research (interviews and focus groups) was a logical continuation of the quantitative survey, and was aimed at revealing a deeper understanding of the motivations, values, perceptions, and internal contradictions that underlie citizens' attitudes towards animal welfare issues.

Unlike web surveys and interviews, focus group discussions were not aimed at re-examining participants' positions, but at exploring the process of collective understanding of animal welfare and environmental issues. The group format allowed us to trace how shared perceptions are formed, which arguments are most convincing, which issues provoke discussion, and under what conditions participants are ready to support changes in the field of animal production.

Unlike using a single research method, an integrated approach provided the opportunity to test the reliability of the results obtained, and form a holistic vision of public attitudes towards animal welfare, the prospect of harmonising Ukrainian practices with European standards, and potential directions for the development of public policy and communications.

## Resume

Ukrainian society has a mature perception of animal welfare issues and considers it as a complex social problem, the solution of which requires coordinated actions from all parties: state regulations, producers, retail chains, and consumers.

In general, this topic generated a high level of interest among survey participants primarily because it is devoid of political bias and directly affects the everyday choices of every Ukrainian. **99% of respondents who buy animal products participated in the quantitative study.** Data analysis shows that there are no regional differences, and **support for improving the conditions of farm animals is equally high among all age groups of the population.**

The study covered several key areas: understanding of the concept of animal welfare, awareness of the environmental impact of livestock farming, attitudes towards the conditions farm animals are kept in (in particular, cage systems for laying hens), perception of product labelling, consumer affordability, and support for the alignment of Ukrainian standards with EU norms.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative stages of the study showed a high potential for informing Ukrainian society about animal welfare, and the environmental consequences of industrial animal husbandry. On the one hand, the quantitative survey showed that respondents understand specific examples of animal housing conditions much better than abstract concepts or general questions about ecology. Despite this, **the level of support for providing animals with proper conditions is 59%, and support for a complete phase-out of keeping laying hens in cages is 81%.**

The part of the survey addressing the environmental dimension of animal production indicated that **for 30% of urban consumers, environmental impact is an important factor when choosing animal products**. During in-depth interviews, however, only a fraction of respondents could name specific examples of negative impacts, highlighting a clear need for broader consumer education on the

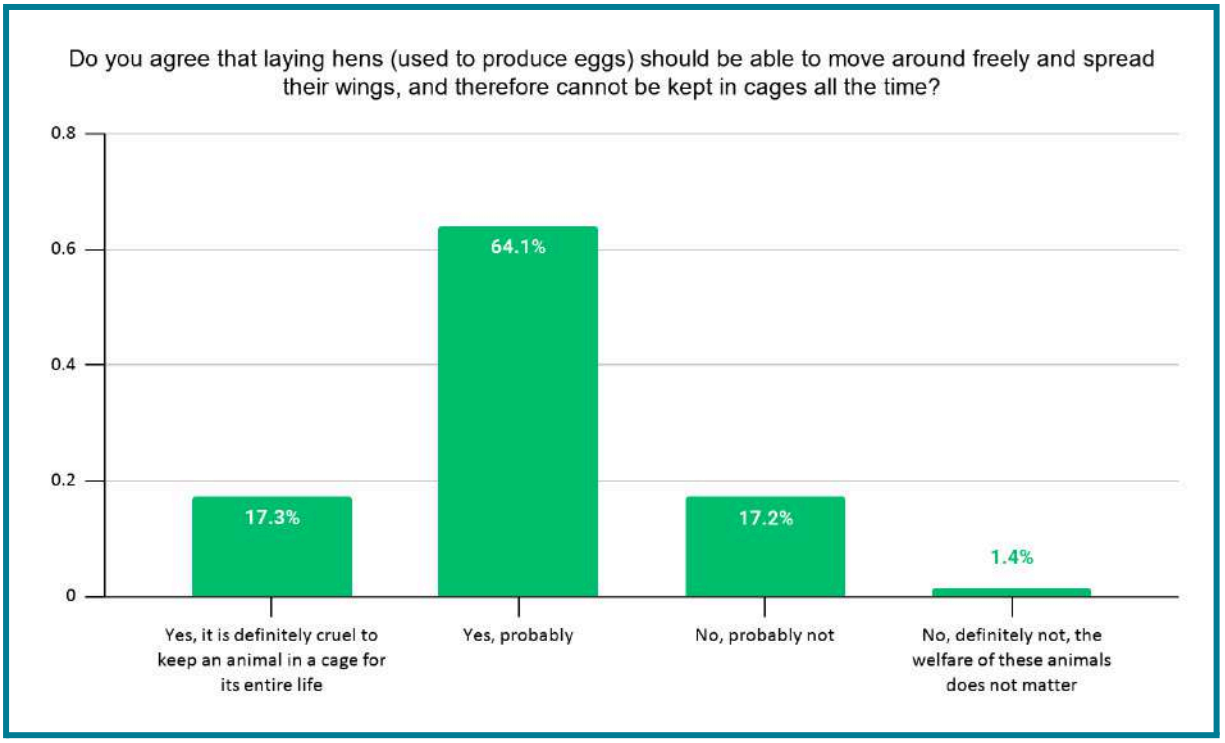
causes and consequences of various production practices. Another assumption is that the survey involved residents of the country's largest cities, which are geographically remote from large livestock operations. It is likely that physical proximity to such facilities is a significant factor in how the sector's environmental impacts are perceived.

**Qualitative research confirmed the existence of deep moral support for better treatment of animals among Ukrainians.** In addition to the identified need for reliable information, consumers have a clear demand for transparency in production, in particular through the use of digital tools (e.g. QR codes on packaging) to obtain comprehensive data on the origin of products. **This indicates the need to transform the general moral support of citizens into conscious consumer choice.** Since society's attitude towards animal welfare is already positive, further steps should focus on changing consumer behaviour by ensuring full market transparency.

## Research results

### *1. Society's readiness for animal welfare and environmental protection standards*

The study provided insight into the public demand for more ethical, transparent and environmentally responsible models of animal production in Ukraine. The quantitative survey revealed that 59% of respondents believe it is important for farm animals in Ukraine to have proper housing conditions and **81% believe that laying hens cannot be kept in cages** throughout their lives.




During the qualitative study, it was the discussion of specific examples like the keeping of laying hens and the killing of day-old male chicks that most clearly manifested moral assessments, emotional reactions, and the limits of social acceptability of various production practices. **The issue of caged animals caused the most unambiguous reaction.** In the vast majority of interviews, cage farming was perceived negatively, regardless of the age, region of residence, or level of awareness of the respondents. The key argument was the belief that any living creature should be able to move freely, behave naturally, and not be constantly restrained.

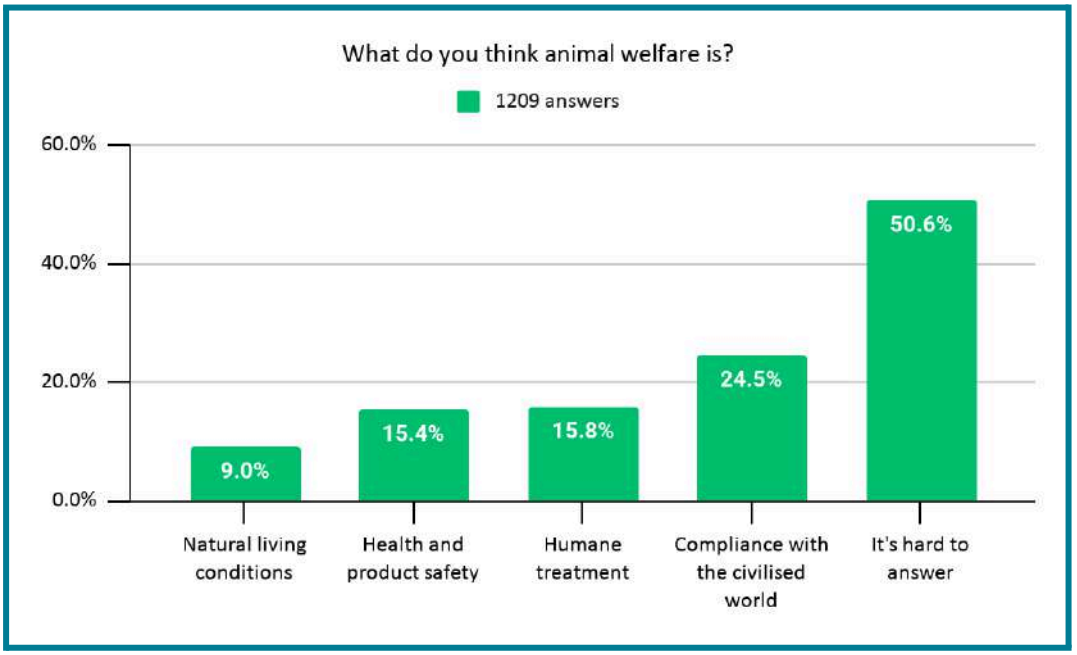
Overall, the results indicate the Ukrainian public has a negative perception of intensive forms of confinement that cause discomfort and suffering. Even participants who expressed some understanding of the economic and technological logic of large farms mostly condemned excessive restrictions on animals. It is important to emphasise that although most participants do not have professional knowledge of technological processes in the agricultural sector, their assessment was based on fundamental moral ideas about the proper treatment of living beings. Thus, **a critical attitude towards cage confinement turned out to be a position with one of the highest levels of consensus among the study participants**.

Even more emotional reactions were caused by discussing the practice of killing day-old male chicks in egg production. For a significant number of respondents, this information was new. However, after getting acquainted with the relevant practice, the vast majority expressed a negative attitude towards it, and described the practice as“cruel”, “wrong”, “unethical” and “inhumane”.

The survey results regarding the environmental aspects of livestock production indicate that respondents' awareness of these standards and their understanding of potential environmental risks influence consumer choice: **the environmental impact of production is considered quite important and very important for more than 26% and 3% of respondents**, respectively. However, it can be concluded that awareness of the risks to the environment and human health posed by industrial operations remains low among urban consumers.

### *2. High potential for informing society*

The results of the study revealed a significant information vacuum when it comes to animal farming. For example, half of the respondents could not define the concept of “animal welfare”, and the level of awareness of the impact of industrial livestock farming on the environment and ecological standards is even lower. **However, the qualitative study showed that a significant part of consumers is interested in animal welfare issues, and is ready to take them into account when making choices.** The lack of available information actually deprives them of the opportunity to put such intentions into practice.




*Answer options:*

- *Natural living conditions: This is when, for example, chickens have space to move freely, spread their wings and rummage in the litter, rather than sitting in cramped cages.*
- *Health and product safety: This is the assurance that the animal is not under chronic stress, and therefore the products are of higher quality, safer and do not contain antibiotics.*

- *Humane treatment (ethics): This is the moral obligation of a person to ensure that the animal lives without suffering and pain throughout its life.*[5]
- *Compliance with the civilised world: This is the introduction of more modern European standards in Ukraine and the refusal to keep animals in cages.*
- *It's hard for me to answer / I haven't thought about this before.*

### *2.1. Environmental impact*

In-depth interviews revealed that the environmental consequences of livestock farming are significantly less understood and familiar to most participants than the topic of animal welfare. This can likely be attributed to urban residents' more frequent interaction with animals (e.g., companion animals), combined with their minimal or entirely non-existent experience of living near livestock facilities.

For many respondents, the interconnectedness of livestock farming and the state of the environment only became a subject of reflection during the interview itself. However, even in the absence of specialised knowledge, most respondents intuitively assume that large-scale livestock operations have a negative impact on the environment. At the same time, higher animal welfare is frequently associated with environmental responsibility, with both being seen as core components of a modern, European approach to production.

A small group of study participants who already possessed some knowledge of the environmental aspects of livestock farming highlighted industry challenges such as manure disposal, natural resources consumption, and the impact of large production complexes on water and soil quality.

### *2.2. Product labelling*

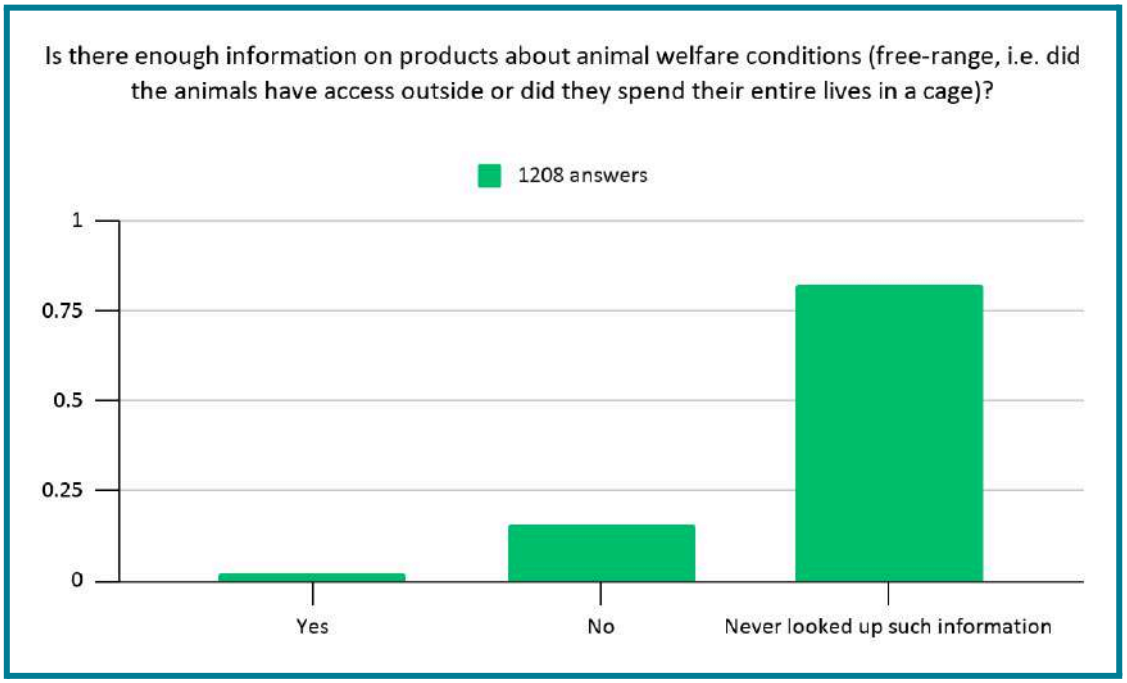
Product labelling can only play a complementary role in driving market transformation: legislative reform and the implementation of animal welfare standards should always come first. With that said, during the qualitative survey, respondents put forward introducing additional labelling that would contain information about the conditions of keeping animals, or product compliance with certain welfare standards. According to the study participants, such information could make the process of choosing animal products more conscious, and contribute to responsible consumption.

At the same time, respondents were not limited to traditional forms of labelling. Some interviewees expressed support for modern methods of information: in particular, the use of QR codes, links to additional materials, production videos, or independent platforms where information about animal keeping could be found. This indicates the readiness of consumers for more complex and meaningful communication formats, provided that such information is understandable and can be trusted.

Labelling is important to highlight to Ukrainian consumers the pioneering farmers who are adopting welfare standards early. Clear labelling would help reward these farmers for their efforts to support

[5] This model was simplified for the questionnaire. The complete model now also includes ensuring a good environment, good mental health and the ability to express natural behaviours, highlighting the provision of positive aspects and not just the absence of negative ones.

animal wellbeing, and would later become useful to show which producers are going the furthest to achieve the highest possible welfare standards.




### *2.3. Trust in labelling*

The issue of trust was one of the central issues in the context of the labelling discussion. Respondents expressed doubts about the reliability of information from the manufacturer himself, as they see him as a party interested in sales. The study revealed a clear hierarchy of trust, where the highest level is held by independent (especially international) certification organisations, followed by state institutions as guarantors of compliance with the rules, and the lowest level is the manufacturers themselves with their own independent statements.

Therefore, the problem is not only the lack of information, but also the lack of clear mechanisms for its verification. Some respondents noted that even if there was a label, they would like to be able to verify its authenticity. This indicates a high demand for transparency of production processes and independent control over compliance with standards. This combination of low awareness with high support for higher animal welfare standards indicates a great potential for educational work, where the provision of accessible and reliable information is a necessary step for transforming positive social attitudes towards animal welfare into conscious consumer choices.

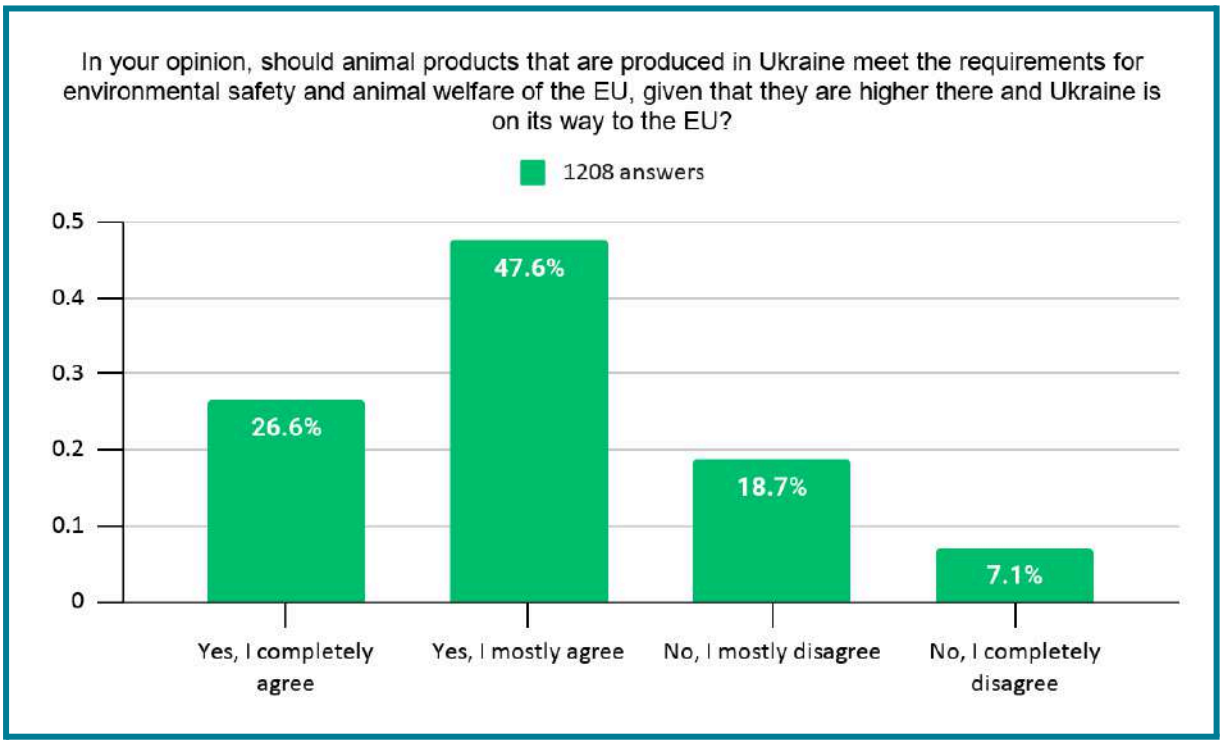
## *3. Economic capacity of the consumer*

The results of the study demonstrate the expected and objective reality that the majority of Ukrainian consumers, in the currently unstable economy, express reservations about rising food prices, and do not declare a direct willingness to pay more. The direct question about willingness to pay additional costs in the survey was most likely perceived through the prism of household financial difficulties, rather than through an assessment of the importance of animal welfare itself.

However, this economic caveat hides a deeper and more fundamental conclusion of the study: **support for phasing-out caged laying hens' production is equally high among respondents who are theoretically willing to pay more, and among those who are not willing to pay the additional costs. This indicates that better treatment of animals is perceived by society as a basic ethical norm, and not as a separate, highly segmented category of goods.** Economic efficiency of production and price sensitivity of consumers should not replace fundamental ethical principles of farming.

### *4. Ukraine's value integration and compliance with EU standards*

Ukraine's European integration is not only a legal adaptation of laws, but above all a convergence of fundamental values. **More than 74% of Ukrainians believe that animal products produced in Ukraine must meet the EU's environmental safety and animal welfare requirements.**




Despite the challenges of a full-scale war, the level of empathy and humanism among Ukrainians remains extremely high. Citizens do not ignore ethical issues: on the contrary, they massively condemn cruel industrial farming practices (including keeping laying hens in cages), and express clear support for Ukraine's transition to EU animal welfare and environmental standards.

## Mechanisms and scale of financing for a just transition

### *1. Why shouldn't the consumer bear all the costs for improved animal welfare?*

Even an informed and motivated consumer is not able to independently change the systemic practices of the agricultural sector solely through their own consumer choices. Market transformation requires an active role of the state, and responsible behaviour from the producers themselves. The state must create the conditions under which ethical choices will become available to every citizen, regardless of their income.

To do this, it is necessary to ensure **market transparency** through the introduction of clear labelling and certification, so that the consumer at least has the tools to make informed choices, as well as functioning **state control** over the implementation of animal welfare standards, which will make it impossible for products derived from animals kept in cages to be present on the market.

Referring to the low purchasing power of the population cannot be an argument for postponing the reform. There is already a public consensus to ban cages. The state's task is to financially support small and medium-sized producers, to help them transform their systems of production, as well as carrying out a targeted campaign to inform consumers about how animal products have been produced. The state must take these responsibilities, rather than shifting the financial burden for systemic change onto the consumer.

*A reference model is Italy's use of supply chain contracts, where a blended finance mechanism was used to combine public and private financing to support farmers transitioning to cage-free systems. Applying a similar mechanism in Ukraine, backed by domestic support programs or EU funding mechanisms, would enable a smooth transition that protects vulnerable consumers while future-proofing small and medium-sized farms.*[6]

### *2. Realistic scale of support and funding sources*

National legislation on the welfare of laying hens in Ukraine applies only to farms that keep 350 or more birds. This automatically excludes households that traditionally keep fewer chickens and mainly use free-range, aviary or barn housing, where the basic needs of the animal are usually met.

If we do not take into account the livestock in households, 38.5% of laying hens kept by industrial farms in 2025 and 1.5% kept by farms fall under the reform.[7] According to 2024 data, there were 127 egg production farms in Ukraine, of which 19 were registered exporters to the EU.[8] It is reasonable to assume that large producers and exporters possess greater financial capacity, which enables them to transition to alternative systems independently.

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[6] *Using Italian supply chain contracts to support cage-free egg production* (Eurogroup for Animals, 2026)
[7] According to Ukrstat
[8] According to the TRACES NT list, a list of registered companies with permission to export to the EU

This indicates that the state should provide targeted support specifically to small and medium-sized domestic producers. Providing grants for the transition to alternative (cage-free) housing systems will maintain competition in the market and keep prices affordable for the population. Moreover, resources for reforming the system can be attracted through international programs and EU support instruments: in particular, the Ukraine Facility program and the EU loan to Ukraine, in the amount of €90 billion approved in 2026.

## Conclusions and policy implications

The study confirms the existence of a deep social consensus: **Ukrainians consider the better treatment of animals a basic ethical norm, and strive to live by European standards**. The introduction of higher welfare standards for farm animals and environmental regulations is not simply a requirement of European integration or an ethical choice, but a critically important step for several other reasons:

**Protecting public health and combatting antibiotic resistance.** Caged animals are unable to express their natural behaviour, creating a state of chronic stress which, in turn, suppresses their immune systems. To combat the effects of keeping animals in cages industrial livestock farms use antibiotics prophylactically to prevent disease outbreaks. This directly leads to the spread of antibiotic resistance (drug resistance of bacteria), which makes common infections deadly for humans. Therefore, improving animal welfare is also about protecting the health of citizens.[9]

**Ensuring fair competition on the EU market.** The European Union is constantly tightening animal welfare and environmental requirements and introducing the principles of "equivalence" for imports from third countries. Ukraine is currently one of the largest exporters of animal products to the EU, especially when it comes to chicken meat and eggs. Therefore, it is in the interests of Ukrainian producers to keep pace with changes in the field of animal farming in the EU, so as not to create unequal conditions of competition with European farmers.

**Access to financing under Common Agricultural Policy requirements and commitments for the EU accession.** From 2023 until 2028, the reformed CAP links any support to the agricultural sector to mandatory requirements (including Statutory Management Requirements [SMR][10]) covering environment, animal welfare and sustainable land use.

For Ukraine, the full integration into the EU agricultural market, and future access for Ukrainian farmers to CAP subsidies and grants, are strictly contingent upon the comprehensive implementation of and compliance with SMRs at national level.[11] Specifically, this includes:

- **Animal Welfare Standards**: Full alignment with general requirements for the protection of farmed animals (Directive 98/58/EC), alongside sector-specific mandates including minimum standards for the protection of pigs (Directive 2008/120/EC) and calves (Directive 2008/119/EC).

- **Water Quality Protection**: Implementation of the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) and the Nitrates Directive (Council Directive 91/676/EEC) to systematically reduce the environmental pressure exerted by agricultural runoff on aquatic ecosystems.

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[9] "Industrial farming threatens our health, produces low-quality food, and contributes to the spread of infectious pathogens", Compassion in World Farming in Ukraine (accessed 25 August 2026)
[10] SMR - Statutory Management Requirements
[11] *"Green Dossier", European Agricultural Policy and Nature-Positive Economy: Prospects for Ukraine.* (Information Center, Kyiv, 2025)

- **Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation:** Compliance with the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC), which serve as critical benchmarks for sustainable pastoral livestock farming and the preservation of traditional, extensive husbandry practices.

These environmental and animal welfare cross-compliance standards are central to the ongoing Ukraine-EU accession negotiations. They are being simultaneously addressed across three distinct negotiating chapters: Chapter 11: "Agriculture and Rural Development", Chapter 12: "Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy", and Chapter 27: "Environment and Climate Change".

Agricultural producer support under CAP conditions is administered through the payment agencies within EU member states. Ukraine is already developing its own payment agency, which will be responsible for administering agricultural financial support in accordance with EU standards. The State Agrarian Registry (SAR)[12] serves as the digital platform for registering agricultural producers and preparing them for EU regulations, as well as for developing transparent support mechanisms for producers, including funding from specific financial instruments such as the Ukraine Facility and other EU pre-accession assistance mechanisms.

[12] State Agrarian Registry

## Recommendations

The phase-out of keeping animals in cages in Ukraine is a necessary step for Ukrainian policy development, in order to respond to the Ukrainian consumers' moral support for high animal welfare standards. **Ukrainians want animals to be kept in proper conditions (59%) and believe that laying hens cannot be kept in cages (81%).** A phase-out of cages will be in line with the development of EU standards, which should be accounted for when considering Ukraine's future in the EU. To implement the reform without a price shock for consumers and with benefits for the market, the following steps must be taken:

1. **Introduce targeted financial support for small and medium-sized producers.** The Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine needs to develop grant programs and preferential lending for small and medium-sized agribusinesses, to help them transition to cage-free housing systems and establish proper infrastructure for manure and other by-product management. Conduct an analysis of available EU funding sources, including the Ukraine Facility and funds under the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Large exporters should undertake such a transformation at their own expense.

2. **Ensure market transparency through labelling and state control.** Legislate mandatory, clear labelling of animal husbandry practices and establish a transparent system of independent certification. Strengthen state oversight of welfare compliance to ensure consumers are assured of the accuracy of information on packaging. Labelling can only be complementary to the legislative reform of animal welfare standards.

3. **Launch a national information campaign.** The state, in cooperation with the public sector, needs to take on the role of an active informant of society. It is necessary to overcome the existing information vacuum and explain to citizens the relationship between animal husbandry conditions, product quality, ecology and public health. Since the demand for higher animal welfare standards is already high, informing citizens will encourage the evolution of their moral support into conscious consumer choices.

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