



Common animal welfare indicators for the European foie gras sector

After analysing the different good practices in place in the producing countries (through national legislation, code of good practice, certification systems...), Euro Foie Gras members have **developed and adopted eighteen common indicators of animal welfare**.

These common indicators are in line with **the five freedoms of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)**. While the five domains model has the potential to provide important guidance for ensuring animal welfare, we believe that more knowledge and scientific evidence needs to be deployed before this model can be adopted as a substitute for the five freedoms of the WOAH, which are the guiding principles for that organisation's work on terrestrial animal welfare.

This document demonstrates **the ongoing efforts and commitments** of European fat palmiped breeders in terms of animal welfare.

Euro Foie Gras calls on policy makers to **fully take into account the specificities of the sector and its contribution** when reviewing the animal welfare legislation in the framework of the "Farm to Fork" Strategy.

A proactive sector in ensuring quality living conditions for animals



Whereas:

- Foie gras production is characterised by a rearing period of 10 to 16 weeks, depending on the species, **with open-air access**, followed by a fattening phase of 10 to 15 days in buildings.

- The **natural behaviour of geese and ducks is characterised by a gregarious instinct**: they move, feed, drink, groom and rest in groups. During the resting phase in particular, the animals gather against each other. Palmipeds do not express any ground-scratching or other specific activity.
- Palmipeds lack sudoriferous glands and evacuate, just like dogs do, the excess of heat by panting.
- To meet breeders' concerns to ensure good living conditions for their animals, Euro Foie Gras has been committed, since its creation in 2008, to a **process of progress and constant improvement** of breeding practices based on the most recent scientific data.
- The **foie gras sector has made many technical advancements** over the past thirty years. For example, research into optimal quality of foie gras has led to the search for foie gras of 450 to 550 grammes, a weight range which is now the most valued by producers. This evolution in the payment scales of producers within the framework of contractualisation with companies has significantly reduced the duration of the fattening phase to around ten days (compared to 3 weeks 30 years ago).
- **Research work has also led** to the establishment of collective housing that combines requirements in terms of animal welfare, sanitary imperatives and ergonomics of the farmer's work, while achieving excellence in production.
- The sector's proactivity was demonstrated by its voluntary approach, going beyond the European legal framework. In this respect, the five European foie gras producing countries adopted the **European Charter on breeding of waterfowl for foie gras** in 2011. This Charter sets out the sector's commitments of the sector based on the 12 principles of the European Commission's "Welfare Quality Project", and which cover aspects related to feeding, watering, housing and slaughter.
- **At the national level**, this proactive approach is expressed in different ways, in particular through the implementation of the **"Palm I Trust"**¹ certification system in France, **Codes of Good Practice** in Spain² and Hungary³ and a **Royal Decree** in Belgium⁴.

¹ The voluntary approach launched in 2014 and led by the sector, aims to guarantee and certify the good practices of the breeders with regard notably to animal welfare (commitments cover, for example, food, comfort, health and animal hygiene). With a set of specifications controlled by an independent body, this approach is part of an ethical and professional approach through which breeders affirm their desire for transparency and continuous improvement.

² The Code of Good Practices on Animal Welfare for the Production of Foie Gras and Duck Products in Spain was adopted in 2020 and follows a similar approach as "Palm I Trust".

³ The Code of Good Practice for the waterfowl sector in Hungary was adopted in 2011.

⁴ The Royal Decree enacts specific obligations relating to the housing system of fat palmipeds in terms of density and space.



Euro Foie Gras decided to go further than the implementation of national good practices in animal welfare, by developing common animal welfare indicators.

The eighteen indicators adopted correspond to **indicators of means** that allow farmers to adopt the means required to ensure a high level of animal welfare.

They are articulated and aligned with the five freedoms, which are the guiding principles for the work of the **World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)**. Widely recognised, these five freedoms describe society's expectations for the conditions animals should experience when they are under human care.

These indicators also serve to **ensure that European farmers are properly implementing EU legislation**⁵, and in some cases even go beyond it. They cover the rearing and fattening phases. Some indicators are adapted during the containment period required by EU legislation in the event of a risk of avian influenza.

The main indicators of means according to the five freedoms of WOAH are summarised below. The full list of all indicators can be found in the Annex.

Ensuring suitable nutrition and hydration *Freedom from hunger, malnutrition and thirst*

- **Records are kept** to monitor the amount of feed consumed (rearing and fattening phase), which allows for traceability control.
- As ducks and geese are primarily aquatic birds, **suitable drinking troughs** are designed during the rearing and fattening phase to ensure that the animals have permanent access to good quality water and can wet their heads as a minimum.

Ensuring that the animals can be kept quiet *Freedom from fear and distress*

- **Daily monitoring** of the animals is carried out by the farmer or by competent staff (partner, employee, etc.). A **visit is made twice a day** during the fattening phase.
- In the buildings, the farmer makes sure that there is a **sufficient natural or artificial light source** so that the animals can see themselves clearly, be seen clearly, visually recognise their surroundings and carry out their activities in a routine manner. Furthermore, animals should not be kept continuously in darkness, nor should they be exposed to artificial light without appropriate interruption. The

⁵ Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes and Recommendation concerning muscovy ducks hybrids of muscovy and domestic ducks adopted by the Standing Committee on 22 June 1999.

farmer must therefore **respect a day/night rhythm**. **During the first rearing phase, a light point is maintained continuously** in order to facilitate access to food and water and to avoid crowding that could lead to suffocation or situations of fear.

Ensuring comfort for the animals

Freedom from heat stress or physical discomfort

- In his/her facilities, the farmer sets up **natural** (trees, hedges and bushes) **and/or artificial** (tunnels, buildings) **spaces that facilitate shelter for the animals** in the event of droughts, excessive sun or rain, thus avoiding their thermic stress.
- For **open-air rearing** facilities, farmers implement **practices that preserve the plant cover**. A period of rest on the run is systematically applied between two successive batches.

Ensuring healthy animals

Freedom from pain, injury and disease

- In the farm, the farmer ensures that **a dedicated area for the isolation of weakened animals** with water and feed can be installed. This should be done at the level of each production unit and at each age.
- The farmer has **prescriptions for all medicines** on the farm.

Ensuring normal animal behaviour

Freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour

- All the rearing facilities have **access to an outdoor run**. This **access to the open air** is a priority for the sector.
- During the **rearing phase, the maximum density of birds in buildings**, by age and floor type, is **adequate** allowing the animals to move freely and to have easy access to feed and drinking troughs.

The maximum densities are as follows:

Maximum density	In closed buildings	When access to an outdoor run
Ducks	25 kg/m ²	42 kg/m ²
Geese	20 kg/m ²	30 kg/m ²

- During the **fattening phase**, the minimum area available is **1200 cm² per duck, with at least 3 ducks per housing**. During the **fattening phase**, the minimum area available is **1500 cm² per goose, with at least 3 geese per housing**.

If you want to visit a **foie gras farm** and have an experience on the ground, do not hesitate to contact us:

<https://www.eurofoiegras.com/en/who-we-are/>

In the meantime, **the video available on this link** will make you discover the production of foie gras in a farm in

France: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b62QedS2BsE>

Created in 2008, Euro Foie Gras, the European Federation of Foie Gras, brings together producers' federations from France, Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain and Hungary. Its goal is to establish a continuous exchange of good practices, know-how and promote the profession of foie gras producer.

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