

Round Table on Promoting Animal Welfare and Environmental Protection in Food Production

Summary, October 2020

The way we deal with other living beings, including farm animals in particular, reflects the values of a society. This sums up the motto of the Round Table on Promoting Animal Welfare and Environmental Protection in Food Production, which met in 2019/20 as part of the City of Vienna's initiative *Good Conscience – Good Taste*.

The current practice of meat, egg and milk mass production is not sustainable. Issues range from often abusive treatment of animals, through far-reaching environmental impacts of intensive production systems, to insufficient transparency for consumers. A paradigm shift and fundamental changes at a range of levels are urgently needed. Undoubtedly, the necessary development towards a much fairer, environmentally sound and animal-friendly food production should and can only take place through cooperation of all stakeholders along the entire value chain.

Based on this conviction, the City of Vienna initiated a Round Table on this topic. Representatives of several city administration departments, hospitals, retirement homes, schools and kindergartens as well as representatives from universities and scientific research facilities, agricultural interest groups, the private sector, as well as environmental and animal protection NGOs engaged in an intensive 15-month participatory process. The participants worked in large and small groups to elaborate measures for effectively improving the current situation. Their work focused on measures the participants of the Round Table can influence themselves.

While the Round Table was still in session, its work was already fed into two resolutions by the Vienna City Council: On 28 January, 2020, the Vienna City Council decided to develop a food action plan called "Wien isst G.U.T.", and on 25 June, 2020, the City Council decided to implement origin and animal welfare labelling of animal-derived food within the city's own sphere of influence. Both resolutions were adopted unanimously. In the Food Action Plan, special attention must be paid to health and social aspects, environmental and climate protection, as well as animal welfare along the entire value chain. This involves taking adequate measures in public procurement, in advising and cooperating with businesses, and for avoiding food waste.

Four parts of the whole

As the overall subject proved to be very complex and diverse, the Round Table participants soon agreed to separate the thematic blocks into the following subgroups and subsequently merge their results:

- Promoting healthy, varied **wellness cuisine** in line with health and climate goals
- Gradually increasing the share of **organic products** in public procurement
- Establishing **animal welfare criteria** in the production of animal-derived foods: selection and award criteria
- Increasing **transparency** for consumers of animal-derived foods

The measures and criteria, as well as the necessary accompanying measures, are set out in detail in the full version of this paper (available in German only).¹

1. Promoting healthy, varied wellness cuisine in line with health and climate goals

Tasty food is an essential part of our quality of life and our well-being. Vienna shall continue to cultivate and maintain this "wellness factor" – in a way that is healthy and respectful towards animals and the environment. According to guidelines by the Austrian Nutrition Society (ANS/ÖGE) and the Austrian food pyramid, it is recommended to eat no more than 300 g to 450 g of meat per week. More recent calculations, which also take into account the climate impact of meat consumption, recommend even lower quantities. In Austria, however, actual per capita meat consumption is far above these recommendations.

¹<https://www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz/pdf/runder-tisch-lebensmittel.pdf>

Reducing meat consumption towards the official dietary recommendations and at the same time increasing the share of plant-based dishes has multiple positive effects:

- on health: A balanced diet with a moderate share of meat reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, colon cancer and other types of cancer, cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis.
- on climate and environment: If Austria were to comply with the meat consumption recommendations of the ANS/ÖGE, it could save more than one fifth of the nutrition-related greenhouse gas emissions at one go. Further, reducing animal-derived foodstuffs in human nutrition by one third, as well as reducing concentrated feed in animal agriculture and food waste would allow for a global shift to organic farming.
- on the budget: Less meat in the diet makes it possible to procure the meat in higher quality (organic or high-welfare) without substantially increasing overall expenditure.

Experience from Vienna, but also e.g. from Germany, shows how popular plant-based dishes can be. Successful examples from Vienna include the "Klima(t)tisch" campaign in the Vienna Health Association² and the "natürlich gut Teller"³ (NGT, literal translation: "naturally good plate"). 35 kitchens in Vienna's hospitals and retirement homes serve around 16,000 freshly cooked NGT meals per week. Meat should primarily be replaced by vegetable alternatives rather than by dairy products and eggs. If meat is just replaced by dairy products and eggs, neither the recommendations of the Austrian Nutrition Society, nor the objectives with regard to animal welfare and environmental protection will be met. The consumption of dairy and egg products is already high in Austria and should not increase further.

Measures of the 'wellness cuisine' section:

1. Establish healthy, varied wellness cuisine in Viennese community catering in accordance with the health and climate objectives
2. Switch to egg-free pasta in community (mass) catering
3. Raise awareness among chefs in community catering and build know-how on the preparation of tasty plant-based dishes
4. Raise awareness among food procurement operators in all areas of community catering
5. When planning new infrastructure with community catering, promote kitchens that cook from scratch, or increasingly switch to supplies from such kitchens in the vicinity
6. Check where it is possible to increase the share of environmentally friendly, plant-based ingredients in community catering and then gradually test and introduce the change
7. Train the teaching staff of all Viennese tourism and gastronomy schools in the preparation of tasty, vegetarian dishes
8. Work towards advancing the issue of sustainable, low-waste cooking in the curricula of vocational schools for cooks and for teachers-to-be in the discipline of home economics (cooking)
9. Raise consumer awareness and provide information
10. Name and present plant-based dishes attractively and put concepts to the test with a supplier
11. Increasingly replace dairy products with environmentally friendly, plant-based foods
12. Create a current regional and seasonal calendar for fruit and vegetables
13. Examine whether the recommendations of the Austrian Nutrition Society can be established in legal provisions at provincial level or in health goals for Vienna
14. Contact relevant partners to check the availability of plant-based foods
15. Integrate measures of the wellness cuisine section into other initiatives and programmes within the sphere of influence of the City of Vienna

² <https://gesundheitsverbund.at/>

³ <https://www.wien.gv.at/umweltschutz/oekokauf/natuerlich-gut-teller.html>

2. Gradually increasing the share of organic products in public procurement

"Organic" stands for sustainable, environmentally sound and soil-based production. This includes:

- Climate protection: Organically farmed soils store more carbon. In addition, organic farming emits less greenhouse gases because it doesn't use chemical or synthetic biocides and fertilisers.
- Protection of biodiversity: By generally using the land more extensively, organic farming contributes to conserving and promoting biodiversity. Extensively used meadows are among the most species-rich ecosystems. Hay from these meadows is valuable feed particularly for young cattle and non-lactating cows.
- Soil protection: Organic farming increases soil fertility through humus formation, longer vegetation cover, organic fertilisers and higher soil fauna activity (especially earthworms). Organic soils thus have a better structure and higher resilience. Organically cultivated soils silt up less and reduce erosion.
- Protection of water: Organic farming is working without chemical or synthetic biocides and easily soluble mineral fertilisers, which can affect groundwater. On organically farmed land, the nitrogen surplus and thus nitrate leaching is significantly lower than on conventionally farmed land.

Legal animal husbandry standards are higher in organic farming than in non-organic farming, with the animals having more indoor space and access to outdoor areas. Certain types of animal housing, such as fully slatted floors or farrowing crates, are prohibited in organic production. In addition, there are inter-branch agreements, for example to end the killing of day-old chicks, against castration of piglets without anaesthesia, and for the use of regionally grown feed. The animals are fed organic feed that has been produced without chemical or synthetic biocides and fertilisers and that is free of genetically modified organisms (GMO-free).

Organic production sets higher standards for on-farm animal welfare. It should be noted, however, that even the organic standards do not completely guarantee animal-friendly husbandry. For example, organic farming does not necessarily mean that all groups of cattle must have access to pasture. Early separation of mother and calf in organic milk production, tethering of cows and dehousing of calves are still common practice and restrict animal welfare. Further, there are no specific requirements for the transport and slaughter of animals from organic farms. Therefore, in addition to gradually increasing the share of organic products in Vienna, animal welfare criteria shall be established which go beyond the requirements of organic production in some areas.

Organic shares already achieved within the City of Vienna administration:

- The city's retirement homes procure beef, chicken wings, shell eggs, milk, coffee as well as potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers (in season) and a range of other produce in 100% organic quality.
- Vienna's compulsory schools run a 50% organic share in their menus since autumn 2019. The increase from 40% to 50% caused additional costs of only 2%.
- The organic share in kindergarten meals is at least 50% overall – in the product group meat, sausages, poultry and eggs it is at least 40% and in dairy products at least 85%.

The following measures represent a "milestone plan" which appears to be achievable at present. The participants in the Round Table want to emphasise that these measures, too, can only be realised with strong joint effort and the will of all stakeholders along the entire value chain. All the accompanying measures listed in the chapters on wellness cuisine and transparency as well as a clear (political) commitment of the decision-makers will be particularly helpful in this respect.

Measures of the 'more organic' section:

- 1) Deepening trust between producers and the City of Vienna
- 2) Community catering to gradually procure animal-derived products in organic quality and/or with higher animal welfare standards (focus on regional production):
 - a) Beef: 100% organic from the next call for tender
 - b) Veal: 100% organic from the next call for tender
 - c) Pork: 10% organic share from 2020, 30% by 2025 (with implementation of "wellness cuisine") or by 2027 (with status quo meat quantities), 70% by 2030

- d) Chicken meat: 50% organic share from the next call for tender, 100% organic by 2030
 - e) Turkey meat: 50% organic share from the next call for tender, 100% organic by 2030
 - f) Beef/veal/pork sausage: percentages as in points a) to c) above
 - g) Poultry sausage: 50% organic share from the next call for tender, 100% organic by 2030
 - h) Eggs: 100% organic or free-range eggs within 3-5 years in products which are made up from egg by 5% or more
 - i) Milk, yoghurt, cream, butter, etc. ('white' dairy products, including lactose-free products): 100% organic by 2021
 - j) Cheese ('yellow' dairy products): 100% organic by 2027
- 3) Community catering gradually also procures all other foodstuffs in organic quality, sourcing them from the region on a seasonal basis wherever possible.
 - 4) To the extent permitted by applicable law, community catering concludes long-term supply contracts (at least 5 years) with farmers, gardeners, food processors and wholesalers.
 - 5) Gradually reducing the share of convenience products
 - 6) Community catering arranges the menu planning in such a way as to allow for both planning by the producers and the utilisation of the whole animal.
 - 7) Incorporating measures into other initiatives and programmes

3. Establishing selection and award criteria on animal welfare in the production of animal-derived foods

In addition to gradually increasing the share of organic products in public procurement, animal welfare criteria are to be incorporated more and more. These criteria are intended to ensure animal welfare on conventional farms on the one hand, and on the other hand to add to organic farming standards where necessary. In addition to husbandry criteria, this also concerns criteria to improve animal welfare in feeding, breeding, transport, stunning and slaughter. In the latter three areas, in organic farming, too, only the legal minimum standards are mandatory.

The introduction of animal welfare criteria is also intended to benefit farmers. Above all, those farms which would like to meet higher animal welfare standards should be approached and supported. A step-by-step implementation of these animal welfare criteria in terms of time and procurement shares will allow producers to gradually adapt their offer and increase their competitiveness. Animal welfare criteria as a prerequisite for the procurement of animal-derived products by the public sector constitute an important incentive for the market, countervailing further intensification and promoting extensification. Farmers should also be appropriately satisfied for the costs of increased animal welfare, while additional costs for the City of Vienna should be minimised as far as possible by, among other things, reducing meat in accordance with the relevant health recommendations, using the whole animal and avoiding food waste.

The animal welfare criteria are graded into selection and award criteria:

- The selection criteria are those which are to be implemented as quickly as possible within the City of Vienna's own purview – including in calls for tender in public procurement (ÖkoKauf⁴), in awarding the "Natürlich gut essen"⁵ label to gastronomy businesses and in events decorated with the ÖkoEvent⁶ label.
- Award criteria are additional requirements for animal husbandry and meat production which may be met in addition to the selection criteria. This can earn a bid a better rating in a public tender (best bidder principle) or yield a higher award level in the areas of gastronomy ("Natürlich gut essen" Gold) and events (ÖkoEvent PLUS). In the medium term, award criteria are to be upgraded into selection criteria step by step. This should be facilitated by changing the framework conditions (legal provisions, operational restructuring and/or societal change).

The Round Table developed selection and award criteria for dairy cows, beef cattle, calves, pigs, chickens and turkeys. Various requirements from increasing animal welfare in husbandry, through the origin and quality of feed, to a ban on certain interventions are part of these criteria.

⁴ <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/environment/protection/oekokauf/>

⁵ <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/environment/protection/eco/natuerlich-gut-essen.html>

⁶ <https://www.oekoevent.at/ecoevent-environmentally-friendly-events>

In drafting the criteria, the Round Table fed upon existing animal welfare labels as well as participants' expertise and the results of intensive discussions in the Round Table meetings. The joint development of selection and award criteria should provide the framework for what is already possible in terms of minimum standards and desired additional standards in the production and procurement of animal-derived products and should therefore be implemented in the best possible way.

In the course of the process, however, participants of the Round Table repeatedly suggested that even some selection criteria can at present not be met consistently due to the current production and market situation. These criteria were nevertheless included as they reflect minimum animal welfare requirements and the objectives of the process. A joint effort is therefore needed along the entire value chain to create the conditions necessary for meeting all selection criteria as soon as possible. For a few selection criteria (e.g. beak trimming of turkeys, caging of sows, tethering and dehorning of cattle) no agreement could be reached.

Measures of the 'animal welfare criteria' section:

- 1) Successively integrating the animal welfare criteria for each product category of animal-derived foods into the ÖkoKauf criteria and into the award criteria for "Natürlich gut essen" and ÖkoEvent (PLUS)
- 2) Developing animal welfare criteria also for less frequently procured animal-derived food products
- 3) Creating purchasing guides for different product groups that allow for a direct comparison of the criteria for different labels
- 4) Attracting new suppliers by providing more information about the results of the Round Table and the associated sales opportunities (community catering, restaurants, events, etc.)
- 5) Increasingly integrating the Round Table's animal welfare criteria into guidelines for quality label and brand programmes
- 6) Examining all (legal) options to prevent products involving extreme animal suffering, live animals or endangered populations from being sold in Vienna (e.g. catering, markets, etc.)
- 7) Define aspects of certification and inspection

4. Increasing transparency for consumers of animal-derived foods

People in general want to be able to make informed choices, whether in supermarkets, restaurants or public catering facilities. This requires transparent information. Aspects of particular interest include quality features such as origin, fairness of production, animal welfare or organic farming. Subsequently, consumer information also shapes the further development of environmentally and climate-friendly production and animal welfare in Austria.

With regard to food transparency, the main challenges are gaps in consumer knowledge on the one hand and insufficient or even misleading consumer information on the other hand.

Measures of the 'increase transparency' section:

- 1) Providing information on animal welfare criteria and country of origin of animal-derived food within the City of Vienna's own purview
- 2) Providing information on country of origin for vegetable foodstuffs
- 3) Providing information on animal welfare criteria and country of origin in federal schools
- 4) Providing information on animal welfare criteria and country of origin in catering and gastronomy
- 5) City of Vienna to initiate an informative declaration on animal welfare criteria
- 6) Raising awareness among teachers, procurement officers, kitchen staff, catering staff, departments of the City of Vienna and other stakeholders on aspects of animal welfare, organic agriculture, food culture (way of eating) etc.
- 7) Examining all possibilities for prescribing origin labelling of animal-derived products on Viennese markets
- 8) Carrying out educational work against misleading advertisements

- 9) Labelling community catering facilities, including restaurants etc., which offer meals that comply with wellness cuisine or animal welfare criteria
- 10) Developing measures for quality assurance
- 11) Setting up a database of regional producers who implement the animal welfare criteria of the Round Table
- 12) Integrating measures into other initiatives and programmes

5. Overarching and structural measures

In the course of the Round Table process, a number of measures have emerged which could be assigned to all four themes alike (wellness cuisine, more organic, animal welfare criteria, transparency), or to none of them. These were therefore grouped together here as "overarching measures". Furthermore, this chapter shall compile the accompanying structural measures that can be taken to minimise any additional costs resulting from the procurement of products with higher process quality (products from organic farming or with increased animal welfare requirements).

Overarching and structural measures:

- 1) There should be a central coordination office, external advice and continuous external communication (project monitoring, possibly with scientific support).
- 2) Monitoring to accompany the implementation of the Round Table measures
- 3) Disseminating ideas and measures of the Round Table
- 4) Integrating eligible Round Table measures into other initiatives and programmes within the City of Vienna's own purview
- 5) Examining whether eligible Round Table measures can be integrated into the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk subsidy scheme
- 6) Implementing measures to minimise food waste
- 7) Sharing best practice examples
- 8) Developing measures to cushion the higher costs incurred by producers when they implement higher animal welfare standards
- 9) Federal procurement programme in the spirit of the Round Table
- 10) Subsidies for animal welfare improvements

6. Outlook

The Round Table now aims at putting these very diverse measures and criteria into practice. It is particularly important to involve all stakeholders in order to jointly pursue the path towards improving animal welfare and environmental protection. Implementation is to take place in the course of the food action plan "Wien isst G.U.T." on the one hand, and on the other hand through all participants of the Round Table, who will continue to maintain the new network and to share and promote the results in their fields of action.