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Animal activists hail EU move

PMS New Delhi

Animal activists in India have welcomed a move by the European Union (EU) to push for inclusion of animal welfare in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) multilateral trade negotiations. They have said they will pursue the goal of welfare of animals, including stray animals in India who are subjected to untold sufferings and hailed the EU move as the right one. Inclusion of animal welfare standards in WTO agenda is urgently needed to effectively enforce

animal standards worldwide, and to improve the appalling condition of slaughterhouses in many countries, including India. India should take the lead in promoting animal welfare as the land of ahimsa, they said.

Animal welfare concerns are being increasingly recognised in food production around the world, but they must be formalised within the WTO trade agreements, according to several senior representatives of the EU who spoke at a recent Brussels conference on 'Global Trade and Farm Animal Welfare'. Czech

Animal welfare on WTO agenda

Agriculture Minister Petr Gandalovic, the new chair of the EU Farm Council, explained that the next six months will see a strong focus on European animal welfare standards, including new slaughter rules. EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou also highlighted the growing importance of animal welfare issues as live animals and animal produce are traded across the world, arguing for their inclusion as a 'non-trade concern' in

WTO agreements. She said: "Animal welfare is gaining rapid momentum, not only in the EU but worldwide". The importance of animal welfare in ensuring the quality and safety of meat was also highlighted, as well as the goal of minimising animal suffering.

Michael Scannell, Adviser to the Commission's Animal Health and Welfare Director in DG SANCO, explained that animal welfare was of increasing importance for all actors on the European market. He acknowledged that the EU - as the world's biggest market for food imports - often comes under scrutiny for sus-

pected manipulation of standards in order to block imports, with any moves to bolster the status of animal welfare in trade policy likely to face allegations of protectionism. But he affirmed that the EU's trade partners can meet - and are meeting - EU animal welfare standards, and should not fear a greater emphasis on animal welfare as a trading issue. The EU does not require exporting countries to replicate its system, Scannell said, but demands respect of the internal market principle of minimising animal suffering.