



## OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare

**TOPIC:** Global Animal Welfare Challenges: Some perspectives

**TITLE:** Consumer Concerns

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The attitude of consumers towards animal welfare has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. The food scares that have occurred all over the world, and the increasing media interest in breeding techniques, have changed the requirement for minimum standards of animal welfare.

Today, over ten years since the BSE crisis, consumer attitudes are less emotional, but no less mistrustful of the industrialisation of food production processes. Recent statistics have revealed that one in two EU citizens is suspicious of meat and other products of animal origin and has doubts about animal welfare conditions. These two factors are now very closely connected in the minds of consumers and they set alarm bells ringing.

Because of the BSE crisis a large number of consumers were forced to face the uncomfortable equation: animal = machine, and they realised that the absence of animal comfort has an effect on the safety of food.

This was quite a shocking revelation for some consumers, but now, they are very well aware that there is a connection between animal welfare and the safety of food. This change in consumer attitudes has meant that they now require far more information about the food they eat and it has brought about a transformation in the quality and safety standards of foods of animal origin.

Today, European consumers ask for more information and greater transparency: they want labels that provide details of the product's origins, but they also want to know how the animals were cared for, what they ate, how they were bred etc. There are often calls for systems of cross-checks by public and private authorities to ensure that producer and breeder guarantees are trustworthy.

To ascertain whether or not food is safe, consumers are no longer satisfied to simply look at their plates. They insist on having the full product history and details of the production process, and they want to know that certain standards of animal comfort were adhered to. These consumer requirements are important, because in a global market where there are few barriers to trade, suitable standards must be established.