

Report prepared by the Ministry of Rural Development on the situation of animal welfare in Hungary



The following short report seeks to provide an overview of what measures have been introduced by the Ministry of Rural Development in the interest of animals in the period of 2010-2012.

In compliance with EU regulations, the Ministry of Rural Development seeks by all means to enhance animal welfare in Hungary. In the course of the last three years, the Ministry has taken

a great number of measures aiming to protect animals from harm and abuse.

In 2010, various Ministerial decrees relating to animal welfare were amended.

- The introduction of institutes responsible for animal welfare (on a broad scale from 2013).
- The tightening of regulations on the forced feeding of waterfowl.

A unified animal welfare training system was introduced, which assures the long-term improvement in conditions for agricultural livestock by facilitating the establishment of an approach by livestock farmers that views animal welfare as a key issue. The essence of the measure is that above a certain number of animals the livestock farmer must designate someone to be responsible for animal welfare who must attend a training course organised by the authorities and refresh the acquired knowledge every five years. This requirement comes into force from 2013, with the exception of broiler chickens (in the case of which EU regulations came into force from July 2010).

With relation to the forced feeding of waterfowl, the tools and methods (material, size and method of introduction of feeding tubes) with which forced feeding may be performed became regulated in detail.

In 2011, the law on the protection and welfare of animals was amended.

- The introduction of animal welfare training courses and disqualification from keeping animals as sanctions.
- The reintroduction of mandatory dog registration, the introduction of the possibility of levying a dog policing contribution, ordering the establishment of a national dog database.
- The introduction of consideration on an individual basis instead of according to dog breed.
- The banning of the use of dogs and cats for food purposes.
- Ordering the development of regulations regarding the use of live animals as prizes in games and lotteries.

It has become possible to oblige offending animal owners to take part in an animal welfare training course – instead of or in addition to the imposing of an animal welfare fine. The reason for this is that the most effective method for the long-term reduction of offences against animals is attitude-shaping. The violation of animal welfare regulations is often caused by the fact that the offender – as a result of lack of knowledge or faulty conditioning or approach – is unaware of the needs of animals, or perhaps does not regard them as sentient beings. If an animal owner repeatedly or purposefully violates the regulations on the responsible keeping of animals, it may be assumed that neither the imposing of an animal welfare fine or being obliged to take part in an animal welfare training course will assure the welfare of the animals the offender owns or shall own in future, and for this reason the authority has the opportunity to make the keeping of animals by such persons dependent on further conditions, or to disqualify them from keeping animals at all.



Two of the country's most pressing animal welfare issues are the unknown size of the owned dog population and the high number of stray dogs. In order to achieve a substantive intervention with regard to the size of the unregulated, growing dog population, it is essential that the authorities that are tackling this issue be aware of the exact number of dogs that are owned. In place of relying on questionable estimates, this objective may be

achieved – and was achieved successfully for several decades – by the registration of dogs by local councils, which measures also have significant animal and public health implications. In addition to forming the approach of the population to achieve responsible dog ownership and the increased appreciation of animals kept as pets, dog policing also enables the acquisition of funds by local authorities that are performing

state responsibilities through the legally enabled opportunity for the introduction of a dog policing contribution based on the dog register, an option that the given local authority may decide to introduce on the basis of local conditions. In this way, the law also encourages people to become responsible dog owners by making those who sterilise their dogs exempt from paying the contribution. It should be stressed that animals taken home from shelters, animal policing sites or non-governmental animal welfare organisations are also exempt from this contribution, a measure aimed at increasing the rate of adoption. The law requires local authorities to use the revenue generated from dog policing contributions to be put towards financing animal welfare and public health measures related to the keeping of dogs. In view of the physical restraints relating to local databases that record dogs that have been received microchip implants, and the lack of communication between such databases, the recognition of dogs beyond the area of authority of the system that contains their data is not possible. This is the reason why the setting up of a unified national database for the registration of dogs with fitted transponders was ordered.

The most important change with regard to regulations on dangerous dogs, which is based on the unanimous opinion of both Hungarian and international experts, is that the authority may only consider dogs on the basis of their individual behaviour and not on the basis of the dog's breed. The main criteria during the elaboration of the new system of regulations were that they be gradual and consistent in nature. Accordingly, in view of the great diversity of cases, sanctioning authorities are also in possession of a wide range of tools in addition to declaring a dog unsafe, such as the written warning of animal owners, the tightening of rules regarding the keeping and walking of dogs, obliging owners to take part in an animal welfare training course, or the sterilisation of the dog, and if needed its euthanasia.

There are occasionally reports of certain catering establishments serving one of our two most popular traditional pet species (dog, cat) as food. Such reports are usually found to be untrue, however as the phenomenon is totally alien to Hungarian traditions, it has been decided that the legal ban on the use of such animals for food is required to prevent its possible spread.

At recreational events that attract large numbers of visitors it is not rare to find live animals included among the prizes – usually the grand prize – in raffles, lotteries and various competitions. However, the sinners of these animals are usually not prepared for keeping these animals in suitable conditions and so the welfare of such animals is often endangered. This is incompatible with the fundamental principles of responsible animal ownership, and therefore the detailed regulation of the phenomenon is required.

In 2012, certain Government decrees relating to animal welfare were amended.

- The transformation of the institution of the animal welfare fine.

- Ordering the mandatory fitting of dogs with microchip implants (from 2013).
- Ordering a ban on the prolonged keeping of dogs on chains (from 2016).
- Restrictions on operations to change the appearance of dogs.

The sum of payable animal welfare fines (HUF 5-150 thousand) payable previously has lost its power of restraint and its actuality. Similarly to the system used in relation to food chain supervision fines that has been used successfully for years, a multiplication system has been introduced, the basic level of which is HUF 15 thousand. The unified system based on consistency assures that similar cases are given similar levels of fines even in the furthest reaches of the country, while there is also the opportunity to take individual conditions into account.

From 2013, dogs older than four months may only be kept if marked with a transponder (microchip). In return for a single payment of HUF 3500 (the maximum sum as determined by law), many problematic situations relating to dog ownership (e.g. dog bites, dogs going stray) may be solved with much greater ease. As a result of the measure, not only are animal shelters and local councils responsible for catching and



collecting stray animals are free of significant burdens, but irresponsible owners may also be held responsible more easily. The success of this tracing system is supported by several international and domestic examples (it has been mandatory to fit all dogs with transponders and to operate a unified dog database in twenty EU member states and in Croatia, as well as in some fifty Hungarian municipalities).

A determining step in changing the future of backyard dog keeping is the ban on keeping dogs on chains for prolonged periods that will come into force in 2016. It is an unfortunate phenomenon these days that dogs kept as watchdogs live their lives at the end of a short chain and within an area of only a few square metres. In the case of such animals, physical and psychiatric damage may often be observed that may lead to abnormal behavioural patterns (especially regarding dominance and territorial relationships) and to aggressive behaviour. Despite the fact that regulations determine the size of the appliance used to keep the dog chained, and as such the size of its immediate environment, the animal's welfare is continuously compromised.

Operations to change the appearance of dogs' ears and tail are somewhat common, despite the fact that they are highly questionable from an animal welfare perspective. In accordance with the change in regulation, only the shortening of the tail may be performed to change the appearance of dogs, and only before the puppy is less than seven days old. The indirect ban on ear correction – taking into account the clear international norms – is justified by the fact that this type of operation poses a

significant risk to the animal's welfare, while having no health-related advantages that are comparable to the seriousness of the operation. However, the retention of the possibility of shortening a dog's tail is also justified, because when kept in a small space (an apartment) or during work in the field – especially in the case of certain breeds (e.g. the Vizsla) – the tail may often suffer damage. If a puppy undergoes this operation during the first days of its life, the intervention does not pose a significant risk.

Picture Gallery

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán inaugurating Central Eastern Europe's largest cattle farm equipped state-of-the-art technologies.



Minister of Rural Development Sándor Fazekas handing over a wildlife park of dozens of Hungarian native breeds (August, 2012).





Minister of Rural Development Sándor Fazekas handing over a new poultry farm equipped with all modern facilities in Southern Hungary (May, 2012).



Sándor Fazekas visits a world-class rabbit farm in the Hungarian town of Lajosmizse.

Sándor Fazekas handing over animal husbandry Grand Prix (October, 2011).





Prime Minister Viktor Orbán with Hungarian Thoroughbred racehorse named Overdose. After having won his first 12 races, Overdose has become the most famous Hungarian racehorse in the world.

For further information in English on activities carried out by the Ministry of Rural Development, we kindly advise you to visit the following website:
<http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-rural-development>