



# SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER

OUR ROADMAP TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE  
FOR THE EUROPEAN POULTRY MEAT SECTOR



## Disclaimer

The AVEC Charter aims at paving the way for continuous improvement. It is designed to evolve across the years and amongst our members. The journey to sustainability and resilience in each EU country is different and must be considered and respected. In parallel, AVEC members are invited to translate and adapt the Sustainability & Resilience Charter to their national strategy towards sustainability.

AVEC is a business organisation and has no legal rights to apply any sanction nor penalties to its members should the following recommendations not be implemented. The role of AVEC is to empower its national members by sharing the best practices available to the poultry meat sector.

# Background

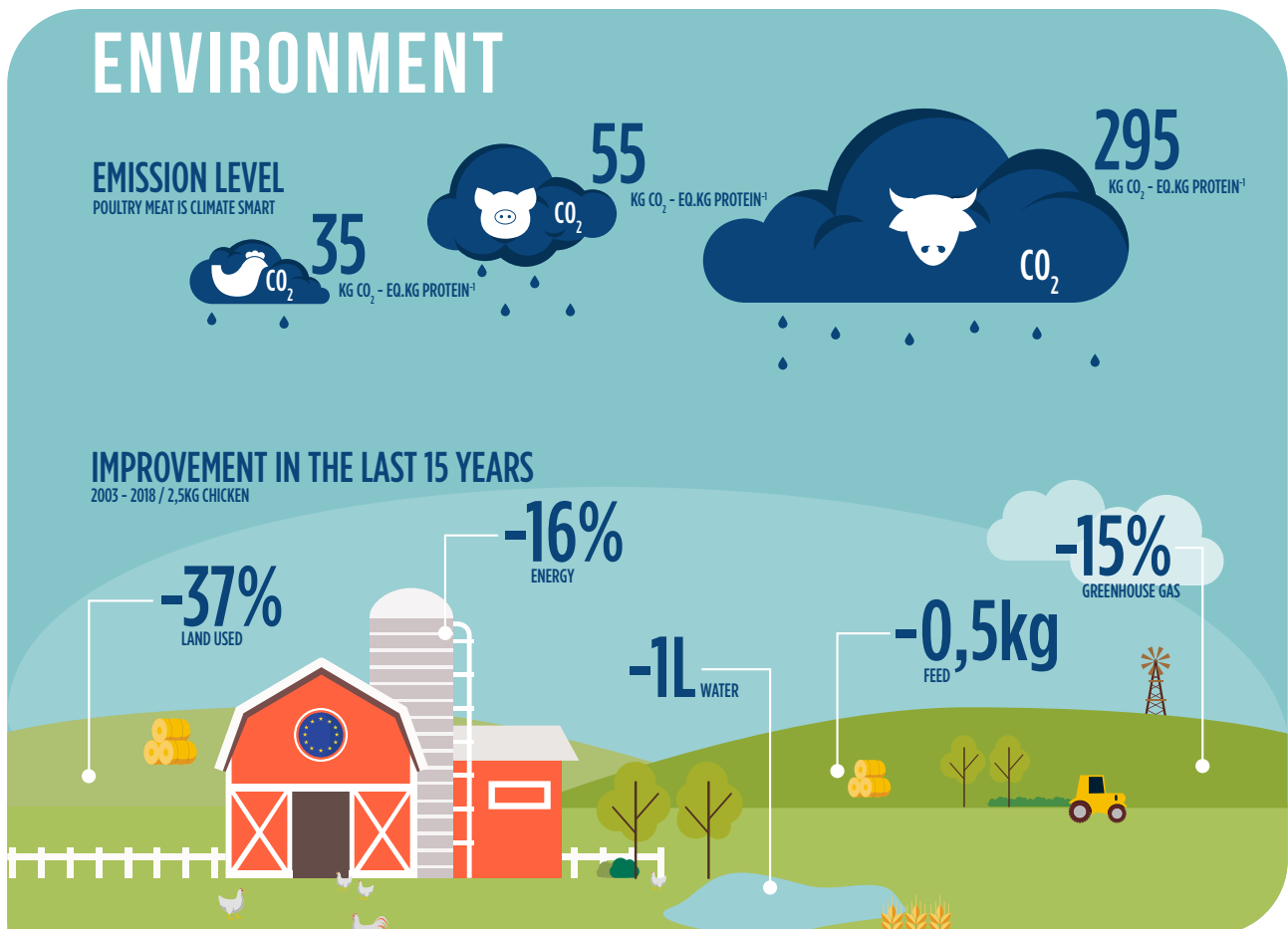
## Our understanding

The European poultry meat sector is a high performing, progressive and sustainable sector which contributes significantly to a balanced and healthy diet for the people in Europe and the world. We supply people with high-quality poultry meat from chicken, turkey, duck, goose, and other poultry species.<sup>1</sup>

In Europe the conventional poultry meat production represents 90% of the market and it is an important contributor to the economic and social development of rural regions. Using highly efficient production processes, only a minimum number of natural resources (energy consumption, greenhouse gas emission, land use) are necessary to generate a highly valuable protein source for the human diet.

Additionally, the European poultry meat sector is an important source of transferable technical and technological knowledge, which is exported to developing countries.

Implementing higher welfare standards for our animals is part of our DNA and we are proud to be one of the global leaders in this matter. Crucial for both, animal welfare and the high product quality is the extensive expertise of our highly qualified professionals that often bring many years of experience into our sector.



Source: EU Poultry Programme, GA. 874712, 2020-2021

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/gleam/results/en/> & [www.aviagen.com](http://www.aviagen.com)

# Progress is our mission

We are a progressive and committed sector, which is constantly working on sustainable development in all the areas of technological innovation, decision making, management, and stakeholders' relationships, throughout the entire production chain. As an integrated sector, we work closely together with all stakeholders, in order to jointly benefit from the exchange of knowledge at all levels.

We are aware that society and politics in the European Union are engaged in an intensive discussion about the future of livestock farming. We see ourselves as an active part in this discussion and as a reliable partner considering the 25% market increase foreseen globally for our sector by 2030.<sup>2</sup>

We stand for an open, receptive, and constructive dialogue with the EU Institutions, politicians, opinion leaders and relevant stakeholders – striving to find new and better solutions.

In the context of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy in which the 27 EU Member States committed to turn the EU into the first climate neutral continent by 2050, the EU poultry sector wants to contribute to a more sustainable and resilient world. This also fully fits with the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed by the United Nations as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fao.org/publications/oeecd-fao-agricultural-outlook/2020-2029/en/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

## United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



## Finding the best balance between the 3 pillars of sustainability – Case study

To illustrate the complexity of identifying the best balance recommendation, let's consider the environmental impact of some of the current broiler "concepts" available on the EU market and their respective labelling schemes.

The European broiler meat market has recently evolved towards the development of "concepts", which aims at offering differentiated products to the consumers. Most of the time, market differentiation is driven by providing more animal welfare friendly products to the consumers. Examples of these labelling systems are **Label Rouge** in France, **Better Life chicken** in the Netherlands, **Initiative Tierwohl** in Germany or Organic chicken as defined in EU legislation. Other concepts are driven by NGOs, such as "**European Chicken Commitment**".

AVEC members welcome this market differentiation development and are producing products for these different segments. However, we cannot imagine a future without conventional production where the consumers would only be left with more expensive alternatives. Consumers must keep the

freedom of choice, and this is why we are committed to continue improving the way conventional chicken is produced.

These special-concept products tend to be advocated and promoted as "the highest standard of sustainability". This has potentially, two negative consequences for the people and for the planet:

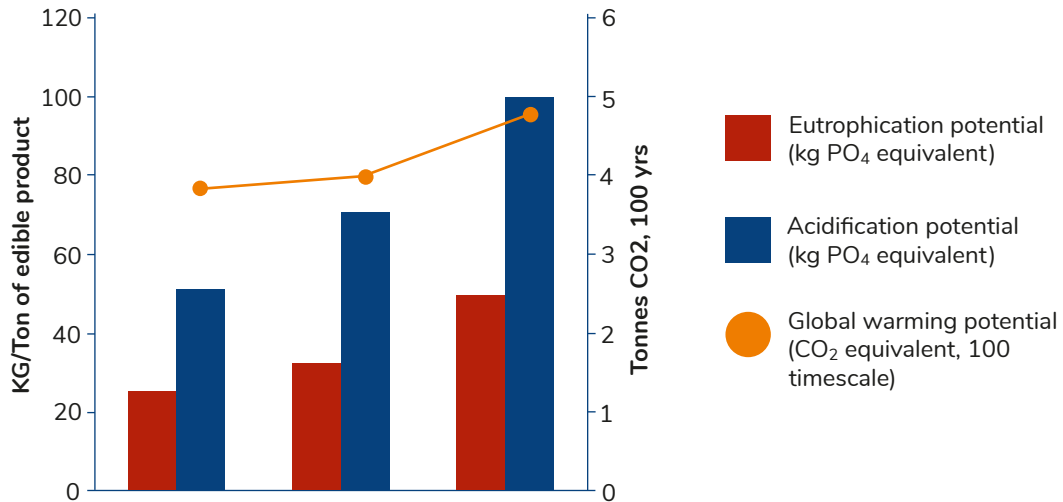
1. they drive consumer prices up (since they are more expensive to produce)
2. they imply and/or offer an incomplete perspective about the total environmental impact of different concepts, which risks marginalising conventional products, thus potentially reducing consumer choices.
3. Finally, they are jeopardising the productivity of the sector, leading to a decrease of the production with the same amount of raw material inputs

Indeed, by focusing mainly on the animal welfare dimension, these new segments do not provide information on other pillars of sustainability. This is perfectly illustrated in different studies comparing the economic and environmental aspects of different concepts.



## Environmental impact of differentiated products:

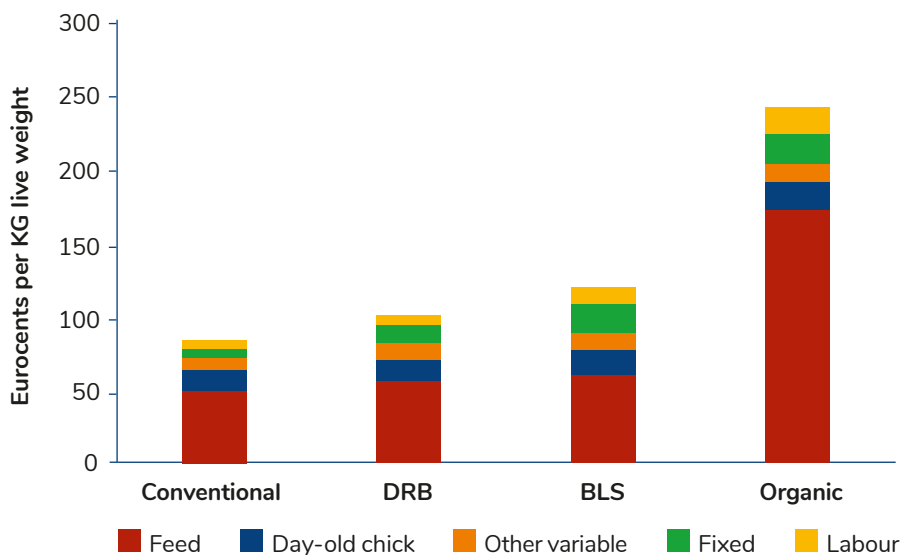
Studies<sup>4</sup> comparing the environmental impact of different concepts clearly demonstrate that those models have a higher environmental impact than conventional production.



## Production cost of differentiated products:

Another study<sup>5</sup> comparing the production cost of different systems demonstrates the much higher cost of production (and therefore final cost for consumers) for the different concepts:

### Production costs and cost components for live birds (eurocents per kg live weight)



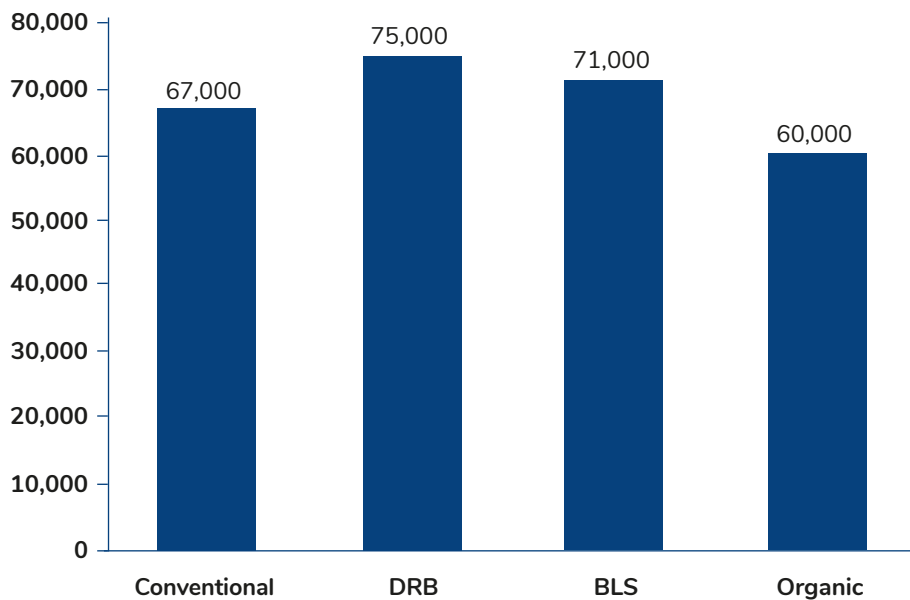
4 <https://doi.org/10.3382/ps.2011-01634>

5 <https://www.wur.nl/nl/show/Report-Economics-of-broiler-production-systems-in-the-Netherlands.htm>

## Farmers' income:

Finally, farmers' income is not necessarily better with different concepts since we see that organic farmers do not get a better income than conventional ones:

### Farm income per full-time worker (euros per year)<sup>6</sup>



In summary, by focusing solely on animal welfare, the current models may lead to a degradation of the environmental impact, higher cost for the consumers and a reduction of the supply of broiler meat for EU consumers.

This is, unfortunately, counter-intuitive for many and are not recognised by key-opinion leaders and decision-makers in today's discussion at EU and national political level.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wur.nl/nl/show/Report-Economics-of-broiler-production-systems-in-the-Netherlands.htm>

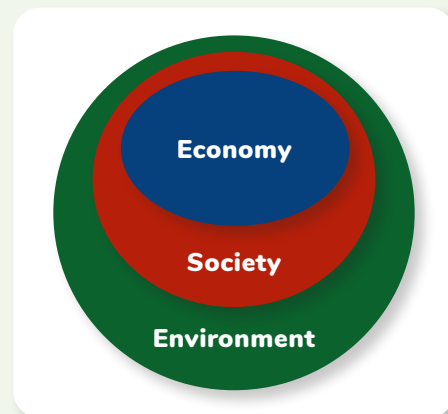
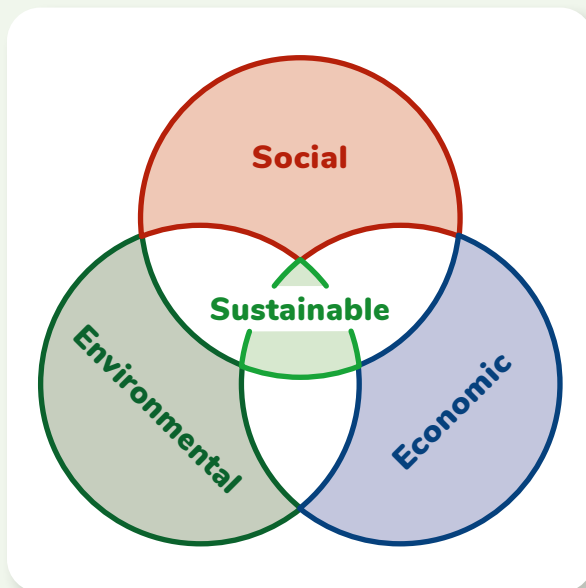
# The consumer should be able to have a choice

The AVEC members welcome market differentiation, and the sector is already offering a wide range of products and is certainly committed to meet all relevant consumer needs.

In conclusion, the AVEC Sustainability Charter wants to provide a clear roadmap on the key attributes leading to the **best balance between the 3 pillars of sustainability and guaranteeing the resilience of the sector in the future.**

Animal Welfare is for sure, an essential component of the “point of equilibrium”, along with other important elements like Environmental Impact, Food Waste, Packaging Materials and Use of Antibiotics.

Finally, the AVEC Members also need the support and commitment of the governmental community as well as the EU Commission, as outlined in the Final Chapter of the Charter.



Purvis, Ben; Mao, Yong; Robinson, Darren (2019).



# The AVEC Sustainability and Resilience Charter

With this AVEC Sustainability and Resilience Charter, the European broiler meat sector commits to a more sustainable future. The aim is to define a path for continuous improvement of sustainable and resilient standard criteria to produce EU conventional chicken in the future. The charter addresses the 3 pillars of sustainability altogether: Environment, Social and Economy.

Very importantly, this charter, based on a balanced evaluation of all the factors impacting the sustainability concept, intends to demonstrate the complexity model, where improvement on one pillar may have indirect negative consequences on the other pillars.

At a time where food security has come back as a major preoccupation in the EU and in the world, following the war in Ukraine, AVEC members are committing to maintain a sufficient level of production to feed the EU and the world population with qualitative and affordable broiler meat.

In our view, it is of utmost importance to make sure that the road towards a more sustainable broiler production will not compromise the productivity and the efficiency of the sector. A world which will count 9 billion people in 2050 needs sufficient and qualitative supply of broiler meat at an affordable price.

The AVEC Charter takes the form of a list of ambitions put forward by the sector on the following areas of priority: Environmental impact, Packaging, Animal welfare and Use of antibiotics.

The AVEC Charter aims at paving the way for continuous improvement. It is designed to evolve across the years and amongst our members. The journey to sustainability and resilience in each EU country is different and must be considered and respected. In parallel, AVEC members are invited to translate and adapt the Sustainability & Resilience Charter to their national strategy towards sustainability.

“ The AVEC Sustainability and Resilience charter aims at finding the best ‘Point of equilibrium’ between the 3 pillars of sustainability (Environment, Social and Economy) to minimise the environmental impact of chicken production, while maintaining a high level of health, welfare and food security, and a decent revenue for producers and affordable price for the consumers. ”



# Ambition 1



## Reduce the environmental impact of broiler meat production

Although poultry meat is the meat type with the lowest GHG emissions,<sup>7</sup> the EU broiler meat sector acknowledges the importance of reducing the impact on the environment through different levers and at different levels of the production stages.

### Reducing the environmental impact of feed:

While the feed consumption represents 70% of the production costs of broiler meat, it also represents a significant part of the GHG emissions of the sector, with more than 55% of the total emissions according to FAO. In particular, a significant part of these emissions is linked to the Land Use Change, a concept which derives from the use of soybean in the broiler ration which is linked to deforested areas (mainly in South America).

#### Action 1

#### Generalisation of the use of protein not coming from deforested area

It is therefore clear that the sector, must act by securing a deforestation-free protein supply. Many schemes are being developed to offer certified soy to broiler producers and we have the ambition to generalise the use of these programmes. The development of alternative protein sources to soy imported from South America will also help to improve the strategic autonomy of the sector and to reduce the environmental impact of the feed consumption.

Therefore, AVEC will encourage its members to use protein feed coming from non-deforested area in the future. AVEC will gather every year the reports from its different members highlighting the use of “non-deforested” feed.

#### Action 2

#### Be part of the dialogue on “Carbon Farming practices” for feed production

Land management can play a crucial role to reduce the climate impact and store carbon in the soil. The broiler sector uses large quantities of feed and can contribute to drive crop production towards more sustainable practices that contribute to the storage of the CO<sub>2</sub> in the ground. Therefore, AVEC will encourage the members to engage with feed producers and other stakeholders to favour the use of carbon farming practices such as the use of catch crops, cover crops, conservation tillage and increasing landscape features (protecting soils, reducing soil loss by erosion, and enhancing soil organic carbon on degraded arable land). AVEC members will be encouraged to submit examples, claims, improvements, scientific work, and results in order to share best practices.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fao.org/gleam/results/en/>

### Action 3

#### Support an EU protein plan

In addition, AVEC will support an EU protein plan to grow more protein in EU but also to develop research on novel types of protein (such as insect, algae, etc.). AVEC will release a position paper urging the EU authorities to work on the development of this plan.

### Action 4

#### Support projects to increase digestibility of feed

The investment into projects to increase the digestibility of the feed will also contribute to a reduction of the environmental impact and to a decrease of the feed excretions that could have a negative impact on the environment. Consequently, AVEC will encourage and support research projects to develop innovative ways to decrease environmental impact of feed, optimise digestibility and ensure the dissemination of the results.



# Reducing the environmental impact of the sector as a whole:

While feed represent by far the largest part of poultry meat GHG emissions, there are other areas of improvement for the sector both at farm and slaughterhouse level but also further down in the chain.

## Action 5

### Develop an LCA analysis of the sector and promote harmonised method of measurement

One of the weaknesses of the sector has been the lack of available data to measure the real environmental impact at the different parts of the production chain. To implement this charter, data coming from the FAO<sup>8</sup> has been used, but a more precise and EU focused assessment needs to be developed to make a proper analysis of the environmental impact of the sector. More importantly, it will facilitate the identification of the areas of improvement, where our efforts should be concentrated.

Therefore, the sector has the ambition to invest in a global analysis of the environmental impact of the EU broiler meat production through the development of an LCA analysis. AVEC members will be encouraged to use the same method that has been used for the still to be developed "AVEC-LCA".

By doing so, we will obtain a precise measurement of the environmental impact of the sector, and we will be able to identify the areas of progress. Based on this analysis reduction objectives will be defined.

## Action 6

### Collect and promote good practices to reduce environmental impact of the sector

At farm and slaughterhouse level, we know that an important part of the reduction of the environmental impact will come from the use of renewable energies, and thus AVEC motivates its members to invest more in this particular area.

AVEC members will report on a yearly basis presenting initiatives implemented on the field that contribute to improve the environmental impact of the broiler meat sector with defined indicators, such as use of renewable energy, decrease of water consumption, percentage of manure used into biogas.

## Action 7

### Initiate a promotion campaign to favour the consumption of other parts of the chicken than breast

Lastly, to reduce the emissions linked to trade with third countries as well as improving the self-sufficiency of the EU poultry meat sector, we have established the ambition to increase the EU consumption of so called "dark" poultry meat (legs, wings, thighs). This may be done through a promotion campaign encouraging consumers to eat other parts of the chicken.

In fact, nowadays consumers in EU have a large preference for EU poultry breast (white meat). This is driving the consumption towards more white meat, and it has led to massive imports from third countries (800 000 T every year) leading to a situation where today 25% of the breast meat consumed in EU is coming from 3rd countries (mainly Brazil, Thailand and Ukraine).

The aim of the promotion campaign is to increase the EU consumption of this dark meat to restore the balance in the consumption of poultry and at the same time to improve the self-sufficiency and the strategic autonomy of the EU in terms of poultry meat production.

8 <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/fr/c/030a41a8-3e10-57d1-ae0c-86680a69ceea/>

## Ambition 2

# Making packaging material more sustainable

Nowadays a large part of the poultry meat produced in the EU is sold fresh in retail in small portions. The role of packaging to preserve the safety and the quality of the meat is therefore primordial and the norm today is to sell poultry meat in polystyrene or plastic packaging.

### Action 1

#### Collect information on the use of recyclable packaging and share best practices.

Our sector is conscious of the impact of these materials on the environment both for its production (requiring fossil fuels) and for the plastic waste it generates. So, AVEC will collect information on a yearly basis from the members on the use of recyclable packaging materials in EU companies and share best practices on that field.

### Action 2

#### Support alternatives to plastic and sustainable packaging

Research projects to find sustainable packaging materials is needed. Hence, AVEC will encourage and support research projects to develop alternatives to plastic/polystyrene packaging materials within the broiler sector.

AVEC will also encourage the development of scientific studies of sustainable packaging materials that guarantee an identical level of food safety.





## Ambition 3



# EU broiler sector will continue to improve animal welfare

AVEC believes that animal welfare is part of a sustainable food production system. European poultry producers are rearing healthy, thriving birds. We adhere to European animal health and welfare standards and support sustainable and responsible production techniques. The poultry meat sector follows the 'One Health' approach to improve health and welfare through collaboration and communication between human and veterinary medicine.

The current EU legislation framework on animal welfare has proven to be a successful and effective instrument for ensuring high quality standard meat to the EU consumers while increasing attention to animal welfare. However, AVEC supports the need to check the existing animal welfare requirements to possibly update the current rules and further align them with the latest scientific data, as well as to provide a harmonised approach, consistency with other policy areas and ensure a level playing field across the European Union, especially in terms of enforcement.

## Science is the basis

In this Charter, AVEC aims at proactively ensuring that the high animal welfare standards are always maintained across the EU.

Animal welfare is a feeling, an emotion, we humans have tried to rationalise through science. Acknowledging the progress made at European and global level is therefore essential to maintain an objective view of the topic. When deciding on measures on creating a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system in the EU, AVEC encourages its members to base decisions on science and not emotions. Similarly, animal welfare comprises of many aspects all interlinked and which could have positive and/or negative consequences on the ultimate goal to increase the sustainability and the resilience of our food production system.

### Action 1:

#### Development of AW KPIs

AVEC will facilitate the development of animal welfare-based indicators. AVEC will encourage that these animal welfare-based indicators will be reported back to the operators along the supply chain in order to improve the processes used.

AVEC will collect information on the improvement that the use of animal welfare-based indicators creates, on a yearly basis. AVEC will encourage to develop scoring system offering a bonus or a malus to producers all along the supply chain to further improve the performance of the EU sector on animal welfare.





## Action 2:

### The generalisation of enrichment tools

AVEC will support research projects where it is investigated which enrichment tools are the most cost-effective and beneficial from an animal welfare standpoint.

## Action 3:

### Natural light for animal... and human welfare

The use of natural light in broiler houses is often promoted as an added value for the welfare of the birds. While lighting criteria are defined in the broiler welfare directive, experience shows that natural light is first and foremost an added value for the welfare of the farmers working in the farm.

Therefore, AVEC will encourage its members to ensure that new broiler houses will be built with windows to allow day light in, starting from 2024.



## Sharing is caring and training is key

Under its platform, AVEC will intensify the networking and sharing of knowledge and experience amongst members to provide concrete examples of measures in place to build the required scientific foundations. Likewise, AVEC aims at creating a forum where members will join forces and brainstorm on new ideas to improve the continuous monitoring.

## Action 4:

### Develop material for training on animal welfare

In parallel and to harmonise and update the current practices surrounding animal welfare, AVEC members have the ambition to strengthen the current training programmes available to food business operators. The idea is to provide a comprehensive and customised experience on all aspects of the supply chain and not only animal welfare.

AVEC will collect information on training programmes implemented at national level and share best practices of training on animal welfare for farmers (rearing phase), catchers and drivers responsible for transport.

# Technologies as a powerful tool

## Action 5:

### Development and promotion of new technologies

Improvement in Animal Welfare also passes by the promotion of new technologies and practices.

Very often a synonym of significant financial investment and accused of 'dehumanisation' of the agricultural sector, the AVEC Sustainability and Resilience Charter aims at demonstrating that digitalisation could be a powerful tool when used efficiently and that little investment is necessary to make important changes and progress. AVEC represents 95% of the European poultry meat production meaning that small and medium enterprises are also part of our members and thus, play a key role in the poultry supply chain. We value their position and would like to ensure that the ambitions of this Charter are accessible for all partners.



AVEC will therefore promote the use of new technologies/digitalisation to improve animal welfare on farm and in slaughterhouses by organising a conference/seminar on this subject in cooperation with other key livestock organisations.

## Anticipating climate change

### Action 6:

### Develop extreme temperature management plan

Another important aspect to better control animal welfare is the establishment of a pre-defined plan in case of extreme temperature situations. With climate change comes more frequent instances where food business operators must continue production under very difficult conditions, of which very low or high temperatures. The sector should be prepared and AVEC will encourage the members to create and implement plans regarding extreme temperatures during transport.





## Ambition 4



# Use antibiotics “as little as possible but as much as necessary”

Antimicrobial resistance in bacteria is a great challenge to all of us. This Charter gives us the opportunity to show how seriously the EU poultry sector considers the issues surrounding antimicrobial resistance.

Antimicrobial resistance does not respect borders and has the potential to compromise the health and welfare of people, animals, and plants. There is a common responsibility of all private/public actors, of the human, animal and plant sectors. Therefore, it is essential to implement the « One Health » approach, global and coordinated: animal health, human health and ecosystem health are all interconnected and constitute a whole.

Appropriate use of antimicrobials is the key to mitigating the risk of widespread antimicrobial resistance and still ensuring animals are treated when sick. The

administration of antimicrobials is complementary to good farm-management practice including strict bio-security policies and properly designed vaccination programmes.

Many diseases conditions can be avoided or minimised by using management practices that significantly reduce exposure to disease-causing bacteria and optimising the environment for the animal, including good hygiene, nutrition and vaccination programmes.



# Responsible use of antibiotics is the solution

## Action 1:

### Implement a harmonised system of collection of data

In order to lower the level of antimicrobials used to a minimum, AVEC encourages its members to monitor and collect relevant data on the use of antibiotics, to analyse the performance of the use of antimicrobials, to set specific reduction targets and above all to adopt a responsible use of such substances.

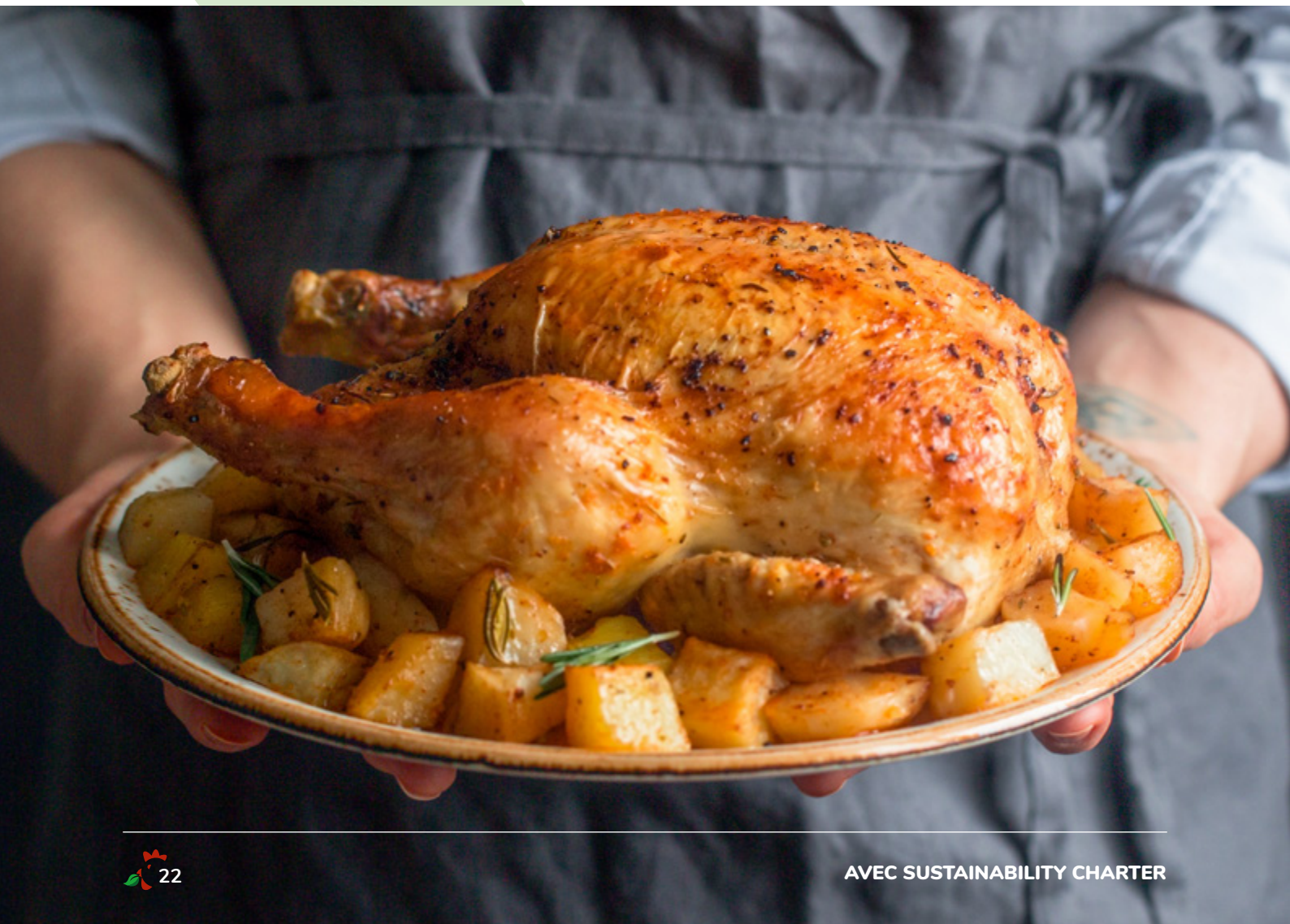
## Action 2:

### Reduce the consumption of antibiotics

Under the AVEC Sustainability and Resilience Charter 2022, AVEC is committed to reduce the use of antimicrobials under the principle of “as little as possible but as much as necessary”.

The baseline should be defined at national level to respect and recognise the tremendous efforts already achieved in some countries.

In practice, we will first acknowledge and communicate clearly and widely on the important progress made by the European broiler sector. We value the efforts made by our members and their national companies and we feel that success should be celebrated, recognised, and shared.



# Commitments **needed** from the EU Commission

The sustainable and resilient future of the EU agricultural sector is in the hand of producers, consumers, and policy makers. The European Union and its institutions will play a crucial role into the successful implementation of the AVEC Sustainability and Resilience Charter.

AVEC and its members believe we are ALL part of the solution. Political decisions should strive for the best balance between the 3 pillars of sustainability, namely: economic, social, and environmental. To that end, AVEC would like to submit to the European Commission the following list of policy measures that are required to ensure a successful implementation of the AVEC Sustainable and Resilience Charter 2022.

- Imported products must mirror the requirements imposed on EU products – also on animal welfare.
- Guarantees for a level playing field for meat imported from third countries at EU border by increasing the frequencies of the controls should be provided.
- Investment in better control of residues in meat imported from third countries to ensure EU standards are met.
- Audit missions in Third countries should lead to controls of the whole supply chain from the hatchery to the slaughterhouse. Controls on the farm and feed mill especially are very important.
- A new legislation on mandatory labelling of origin for all products containing poultry meat (especially in out of home consumption) must be introduced.



**Association of Poultry Processors and  
Poultry Trade in the EU countries**

**AVEC secretariat**

**Rue du Luxembourg 47-51**

**B-1050 Brussels**

**Belgium**

**Phone +32 2 238 10 82**

**Web: [www.avec-poultry.eu](http://www.avec-poultry.eu)**

**Email: [avec@avec-poultry.eu](mailto:avec@avec-poultry.eu)**

**🐦 @AvecPoultry**

**🏠 AVEC EU Poultry**

