

# EURO FOIE GRAS

## FÉDÉRATION EUROPÉENNE DU FOIE GRAS

### EUROPEAN CHARTER ON BREEDING OF WATERFOWL FOR FOIE GRAS\*

In July 2008, the five European countries producing foie gras, namely Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, France and Hungary, formed the European Federation of Foie Gras (Euro Foie Gras) to promote their profession, explain its specificities and develop specific common projects aiming at improving and harmonising the practices for the whole sector.

Concerned about the respect of animal welfare, Euro Foie Gras has published in the form of a charter the commitments stemming from the experience of breeders who have to regulate these farming activities in the spirit of the 12 principles of the *Welfare Quality Project*.

#### Whereas:

★ *a. Only some races or lineages of waterfowls selected over generations are capable of producing foie gras,*

★ *b. The major site of synthesis of fats, lipids or fatty acids is located, in birds as well as in fish, in the liver, which plays naturally the role of storage in a reversible process as it does not cause cellular disintegration,*

★ *c. Waterfowls lack sudoriferous glands and evacuate, just like dogs do, the excess of heat by panting,*

★ *d. In addition to the above physiological specificities, waterfowls present the following particular anatomic characteristics:*

- Particular morphology of the oral cavity with possibility for alignment of the beak and the neck due to the absence of cartilaginous glottis;
- The opening of the air ways is located at tongue level and it is closed by reflex, which allows waterfowls to feed under water without choking and therefore without drowning,
- Elastic walls of the oesophagus and formation of a storage pouch at the base of the oesophagus called "fake crop" that allows them to swallow larger preys (fish or frogs) or vegetal matter in large volumes followed by gradual liberation of this food into the proventriculus and then into the gizzard,
- Existence of natural protection of the oesophagus walls which allows them to

ingest without damage small pebbles that participate in the grinding of the food at the level of the gizzard.

★ *e. At present, the only mastered method for production of foie gras is the assisted feeding of waterfowls in the end period of breeding,*

★ *f. The best interest of farmers is closely connected with maintaining the animals' good health and respecting their welfare.*

**The European Union producers have developed special breeding modes adapted to the concerned species and genotypes and allowing production of foie gras based on 2 phases:**

**1) Breeding phase stretching from hatching to the end of growth: it covers the major part of the breeding cycle, i.e. between 10 and 15 weeks depending on the specific species. During this phase the waterfowls have systematic access to an outdoors course;**

**2) The phase of fattening which comes after the end of breeding and extends, in most cases, over a period from 9 to 20 days depending on the species.**

**In order to better prepare the animals to fattening, there is a transition phase that links the 2 phases above. It consists in getting the animal used to be fed by portions thus developing its aptitude to fattening (elasticity of the oesophagus, storage of food and synthesis of lipids).**

★ **1. Animals should not suffer from prolonged hunger, i.e. they should have a sufficient and appropriate diet.**

During the breeding phase, animals shall receive at will well-balanced food adapted to their specific needs. This food shall comprise cereals and protein crops produced either on the farm or by an external supplier whereas in the latter case the farmer must verify the composition of the food supplied. Over the last weeks of breeding, animals shall be prepared to the fattening phase by receiving food allocated into meals in order to stimulate the bulimic instinct of waterfowls.

After the end of growth, only robust and healthy animals shall be fattened. During this phase waterfowls shall be fed by assisted feeding mostly, between 2 and 4 meals per day depending on the species. This gradual feeding shall be adapted to the capacity of each animal and it shall copy the natural process of preparing to migrate. Fattening practices consist in putting the food into the oesophagus and the «fake crop», which is an elastic storage pouch located at the base of the neck. To this end, the farmer shall use a tip adapted to the anatomic specificities of each species, which is verified on a regular basis.

★ **2. Animals should not suffer from prolonged thirst, i.e. they should have a sufficient and accessible water supply**

Waterfowls shall have permanent free access to drinkable water.

★ **3. Animals should have comfort around resting**

While they are young, animals shall be placed in a building, which is well-lit, heated and ventilated and must have a well-maintained nesting area. As soon as outside conditions allow it, the animals shall have access to an outdoor course on quality ground.

During the fattening period, the living quarters shall be equipped with flooring that allows the respect of the hygiene and comfort of the animal.

★ **4. Animals should have thermal comfort, i.e. they should neither be too hot nor too cold**

Buildings that house young animals shall be properly heated and ventilated to get them the thermal comfort that they need depending on their age. During the fattening phase, in order to facilitate the regulation of their body temperature, the buildings shall be ventilated and, if necessary, with controlled temperature. The air quality and circulation (temperature, humidity and flow) shall be continually maintained to protect the animals' comfort.

★ **5. Animals should have enough space to be able to move around freely**

The space allocated for each animal shall be appropriate and adapted to each growth phase.

As soon as outside conditions allow it, waterfowls shall have access to an outdoor course allowing them to move freely. However, it should be noted that the herd instinct of waterfowls makes them move and stay in groups.

During the fattening phase, the animals should dispose of enough space to make natural movements that are required for their needs. To this end, the European producers shall gradually put in place collective lodgings.

★ **6. Animals should be free of physical injuries**

The breeders, made aware and trained in the physiological specificities of waterfowls, learn how to handle the animals safely.

During the various stages of the animal's life, and especially during transport, disease prevention and assisted feeding, they take care of the good quality and maintenance of the materials that come into contact with the animals.

Farms are monitored by specialised technicians and verifications are carried out by veterinarians who supervise the animals' good health condition.

★ **7. Animals should be free of disease, i.e. farmers should maintain high standards of hygiene and care**

Knowing that the strict respect of the legislation is a prerequisite for the animals' good health and thus for the supply of high quality products to the consumers, each waterfowl breeder shall take special care of the animals. The local veterinary doctor and/or technician in charge of supervising the farm shall carry out verifications.

A premise used as sanitary checkpoint shall be installed at the farm's entrance to prevent the entry of external contaminations by men. The animals in need of care shall be taken care of in strict respect of the legislation and of the local veterinarian's instructions.

★ **8. Animals should not suffer pain induced by inappropriate management, handling, slaughter, or surgical procedures**

Assisted feeding shall only be implemented by competent staff well aware of the physiological characteristics of waterfowls and the fattening techniques using appropriate tools and equipment. The feeder must use a tip that is adapted to the anatomic specificities of each species and is submitted for verification on a regular basis. Beak dulling and claw-clipping shall be carried out in strict respect to the recommen-

dations of the Permanent Committee of the Council of Europe. Animals shall be anaesthetised before slaughter using a device that is correctly adjusted and properly maintained.

★ **9. Animals should be able to express normal, non-harmful, social behaviours**

Waterfowls are animals that live in groups naturally. The size and density of the group are compatible with appropriate human supervision on a daily basis so that the animals' welfare conditions are met. Therefore, during the fattening phase, the European producers shall put in place collective cages to replace the existing individual cages.

★ **10. Animals should be able to express species-specific behaviours**

During the breeding phase, the access to an outdoors course adapted to their needs the waterfowls shall have the possibility to explore the natural environment. Outdoor watering equipment shall be positioned in a way to prevent the presence of still water, which is a potential contamination source, and designed to allow the animals to express species-specific behaviours.

During the phase of fattening, the collective cages shall allow in particular the waterfowls to stand, to turn around, to spread their wings and to smooth feathers as specified in the recommendation of the Standing Committee of the Council of Europe.

★ **11. Animals should be handled well in all situations, i.e. handlers should promote good human-animal relationships**

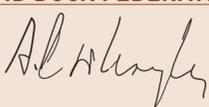
The handling, to which the waterfowls are subjected during their breeding, shall be limited to the necessary minimum. The waterfowls must be then caught by a staff that is competent and made sensitive to the animal welfare, placed under the responsibility of the breeder.

During transfer operations, the breeder shall make sure that every effort is made to prevent any damage to the waterfowls. It could be appropriate to maintain a low-intensity light source for this purpose.

★ **12. Negative emotions such as fear, distress, frustration or apathy should be avoided**

From their youngest age, the breeder shall assure a daily visit. The regular presence of the breeder with the animals is also a prerequisite for quiet animals. Furthermore, the outdoor courses shall be protected or enclosed to limit any predators' entry.

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