

Responsible procurement:

A step away from Frankenchickens



Project 1882.

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Contracting authorities can truly contribute to improving the welfare of animals due their large quantities of food purchased. Now there is the opportunity to procure chicken meat from breeds with limited growth rate. I sincerely hope that more procurers choose to seize this opportunity.

– Ingela Nannström, Food Service Manager, Knivsta municipality

Introduction: Procurement for better animal welfare

Public procurement can be a powerful instrument to drive positive societal change, including improving animal welfare and advancing sustainability. Leveraging their significant purchasing power, procuring public entities can establish requirements that promote animal welfare standards and increase environmental responsibility. By aligning procurement strategies with sustainability goals, such as those in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the public sector can stimulate the market to develop innovative and sustainable solutions. Through collaboration with industry and civil society, public procurement can play a pivotal role in building a more sustainable society. One sector where public procurement can contribute to such a change is the chicken industry, which in its current form carry serious animal welfare concerns.

In recent years, growing attention has been paid to the dire conditions currently faced by many of the chickens in industrial animal farming. [...] The Ljusdal municipality is a significant actor, our citizens expect us to do what we can to contribute to animal welfare.

– Kristoffer Kavallin, member of The Swedish Green Party and of the municipal council in Ljusdal.

A particularly urgent issue in the chicken industry is the widespread use of *Frankenchickens*. These fast-growing hybrids are bred for rapid growth, which significantly increases their risk of disease, pain, and premature death. The growth-oriented breeding has resulted in Frankenchickens growing so fast that they often suffer from pain, and the majority develop some kind of movement disorder before they are slaughtered at about 35 days of age. At the time of slaughter, a Frankenchicken has grown 50 times its hatching weight. In the latest survey conducted for Project 1882's annual ranking of animal-friendly municipalities, over a quarter of the responding municipalities expressed that they would seize the opportunity to phase out Frankenchickens in their upcoming procurements by adopting a new criterion introduced by the Swedish National Agency for Public Procurement. Project 1882 views this new criterion as a critical step towards improved animal welfare and welcomes the growing commitment to improved chicken welfare by the Swedish municipalities.

Swedish chicken production

In Sweden, more than 100 million chickens are bred annually for slaughter.¹ Over the past 25 to 30 years, chicken meat has become the most rapidly growing type of meat in terms of consumption in the Swedish market.² The industry is characterized by large-scale production and a high degree of centralization, with few but very large production facilities. On average, a single chicken factory farm in Sweden holds approximately 70,000 chickens per breeding cycle.³ This industrial-scale approach poses significant risks not only to animal welfare but also to the resilience of the food supply system. The concentration of large number of animals in confined spaces heightens the risk of disease outbreaks, which could have devastating consequences for the Swedish food production. A single major outbreak in one factory could disrupt the entire supply chain.

For the past three years, Project 1882 has surveyed the state of animal welfare at the four largest chicken slaughterhouses in Sweden. The findings show that Frankenchickens all over the country are exposed to what can only be described as a systematic animal cruelty. In 80 % of the conducted surveys, animal welfare breaches were revealed.⁴ The reoccurring reports on the lack of animal welfare in the Swedish chicken industry confirm that the suffering is not caused by isolated incidents. Rather, they point to a faulty system, tied to the use of Frankenchickens and the massive scale of the chicken industry.

Overcrowding

An estimated 99 % of Swedish chicken producers are members of the industry organization Svensk Fågel. Membership in this organization allows producers to keep chickens in more densely crowded conditions compared to non-member producers, up to 25 chickens per square meter. This is permitted because the producers are connected to a control program managed by the organization.⁵ However, such high stocking density (level of crowdedness) puts Sweden amongst the ten worst-performing countries in the EU.^{6,7}

Since 2023, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) recommends to swiftly decrease the crowdedness for chickens for them to have the ability to perform natural behaviour and to mitigate the risk of foot-pad dermatitis (corrosive burns under their feet). EFSA's recommended limit is 11 kg/ square meter – less than a third of the existing limit in Sweden of 36 kg/ square meter, which is similar to the rest of Europe.⁸

Frankenchickens

Chickens bred from fast growing hybrids, often referred to as *Frankenchickens*, face a higher risk of catching disease and to suffer from serious leg problems, which also makes them more likely than healthier breeds to die prematurely, before they even reach

slaughter age.^{9,10} In Sweden, the hybrid breed “Ross 308”, developed by the international breeding company Aviagen, dominates the chicken production.¹¹

Since 2023 the EFSA recommends a maximum growth rate for chickens at 50 grams per day – significantly less than the growth rate of the Ross 308-hybrid.¹² This recommendation is based on scientific research, indicating that changing genetics is the most effective way to reduce the animal welfare problems connected to rapid growth rates.¹³ Eliminating the use of Frankenchickens would also mean an end to the restrictive feeding practices which causes constant hunger for the parental animals.¹⁴ This hunger often leads to aggression and increased competition for food, resulting in animals harming each other – a serious animal welfare issue highlighted by *Uppdrag granskning* (“Mission: Investigate”; a Swedish television program focusing on investigative journalism) in the fall of 2023.¹⁵

In a 2017 report by the EU Commission, Sweden was identified as one of the countries with the highest rate of fast-growing chickens. Back then, 99 % of all chickens hatched in Sweden were Frankenchickens.¹⁶ The development for improvement has since been slow; in 2024, the market share of Frankenchickens was about 98 %.¹⁷ At the same time, the chicken production in several other EU-countries has developed towards a significant increase in the share of healthier and slower-growing breeds.^{18,19}

The use of Frankenchickens goes beyond the suffering of animals; it also causes challenges for the Swedish market. These challenges could increase drastically unless there is a change in the production line. Swedish municipalities and companies prefer to buy domestically produced meat, primarily for perceived animal welfare benefits. However, these benefits are absent due to the use of Frankenchickens. The limited availability of Swedish chicken meat from healthier breeds causes a supply market imbalance that has led to some companies and municipalities instead turning to foreign markets.²⁰ Products from companies like La Belle de France, which uses healthier native breeds, are becoming increasingly more common among Swedish wholesalers.

In neighbouring countries, the progress has been faster, driven by initiatives from politicians and academics. In Denmark, there is an ongoing project to phase out the public procurement of Frankenchickens.²¹ In Norway, the government has been given recommendations from *Rådet för dyreetikk and from Mattilsynet*.²² Even though Norway and Denmark share similar regulations with Sweden, their producers show a greater variety of initiatives resulting in a smaller share of Frankenchickens and hence a better life for a large number of animals.²³ Norsk Kylling, one of Norway’s top three chicken producers, has successfully transitioned from Frankenchickens to healthier breeds, a move that even increased their profitability.²⁴ By phasing out Frankenchickens, the mortality rate during the breeding process drastically decreased and medication like coccidiostatics has decreased significantly.

The use of slower-growing, healthier chicken breeds has been shown to decrease prevalence of disease, leg problems, and premature mortality. A Norwegian study demonstrated that the discarding of chickens decreased significantly when breeders transitioned to healthier breeds through the welfare criteria in the European Chicken Commitment (ECC). Franken chickens like Ross 308 often suffer from ascites – a painful accumulation of fluids in the abdominal cavity – and muscular problems that make the meat unfit for consumption.²⁵ In Sweden, about three million chickens are discarded each year.²⁶ A transition to healthier chicken breeds would reduce the waste of life and food, while contributing to a more ethical and sustainable food production system.²⁷



New procurement criteria regarding growth rate

By incorporating specific animal welfare criteria when procuring products like meat, dairy products, and eggs, municipalities and other public agencies can promote animal welfare. These animal welfare requirements can target various aspects of production like breeding, transportation and slaughter.

Until recently, the Swedish National Agency for Public Procurement's criteria for chicken meat procurement have mirrored the Swedish animal welfare legislation, with a few exceptions regarding ecological production. However, in 2023, the agency introduced updated criteria for chicken meat, including an opportunity to prioritize animal welfare more effectively. The updated criteria include a new opportunity to choose meat from

healthier and slower-growing chicken breeds, articulated in the criterion called “Breeds with limited growth rate”.

ABOUT THE SWEDISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR PUBLIC PROCUREMENTS CRITERION

Name: Breeds with limited growth rate

Level: Spearhead

Type: Technical specification

Id: 11559

Group: Chicken meat

The municipalities opt out on Frankenchickens

There has been a great interest from Sweden’s municipalities regarding the new procurement criterion “Breeds with limited growth rate”.²⁸ Project 1882 has witnessed an increasing awareness and commitment from the Swedish municipalities regarding the extensive animal welfare problems in chicken factories. Many municipality representatives reacted strongly to the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*’s critically reviewing program *200 sekunder* during the spring of 2021, which revealed how chickens for an extensive period of time had been scalded alive at the leading chicken factory Kronfågel’s slaughterhouse. According to *Aftonbladet*, 90 of Sweden’s 290 municipalities halted their purchases from Kronfågel as a response to the revelation. The interest from the municipalities has also been strong when Project 1882 has communicated on animal welfare breaches at chicken slaughterhouses in Sweden. These revelations, and the attention they generate, have increased the demand for chicken meat produced with a higher level of animal welfare.

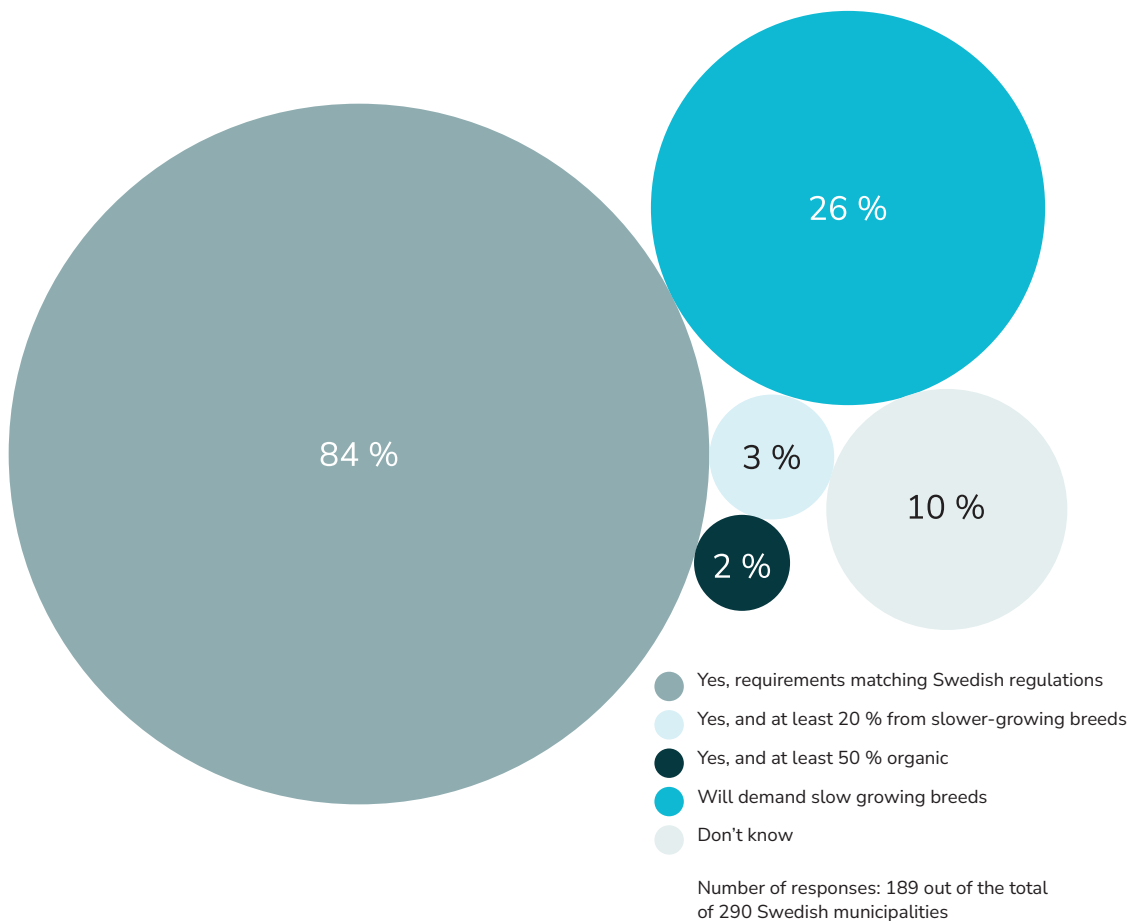
The commitment is also reflected in the surveys of Project 1882’s Swedish municipality ranking, “Animal friendly municipality”. In the 2024 survey, more than one in four municipalities stated that they would use the criterion “Breeds with limited growth rate” in their upcoming procurements. The survey also showed that 84 % of the Swedish

municipalities today procure using animal welfare requirements matching regulations for Swedish animal production. One third (6 out of 18) of all respondents that had commented on the new criterion highlighted that the limited supply of chicken meat from slower-growing breeds on the Swedish market was a problem, as they would want to purchase larger quantities than what was currently available.

“We believe that producers must be influenced to get increased volumes to the public sector. We also need the politicians to engage in this matter.”

– Caroline Axelson Johansson, Developer, Västerås municipality

The survey also shows that many of the municipalities has decreased their overall serving of chicken meat. In the 2024 survey, 17 % of the respondents claimed to have decreased their serving of chicken meat during the past year, which was more than the year before.



In the 2024 survey Animal friendly municipality, more than one in four municipalities stated that they would use the criteria “Breeds with slower growth rate” in upcoming procurements. Several parallel answers were permitted.

ABOUT ANIMAL FRIENDLY MUNICIPALITY

Project 1882's "Animal friendly municipality" ranking evaluates Sweden's municipalities based on their efforts to adopt animal-friendly practices. The ranking is based on surveys that examine activities and purchases, with a particular focus on the food served in schools and preschools. The degree of plant-based food served and the level of animal welfare requirements in the procurement of animal products, influence the ranking position mostly. The survey which forms the basis of this report was conducted between November 2023 and March 2024, with 66 % of Sweden's municipalities responding to the survey. For more detailed information please visit [this site](#).

Better animal welfare with European Chicken Commitment (ECC)

European Chicken Commitment (ECC) is a set of welfare criteria designed to support companies in their sustainability work. It addresses key areas such as reducing overcrowding, increasing outdoor access, and eliminating the use of Franken chickens. The ECC criteria have been developed by Project 1882 together with 27 other leading animal rights and animal welfare organizations across Europe. These criteria are based on the latest research on animal welfare and should be implemented by 2026.

The Swedish version of the ECC criteria includes, in addition to the basic criteria, that more chickens get to be outdoors, by requiring that a minimum of 20 % of all individuals should have access to the outdoors. Like the municipalities, companies have over the years increased their demand for chicken meat that meets higher animal welfare standards, demonstrating a growing commitment to the principles outlined by the ECC.^{29,30}

The Swedish National Agency for Public Procurement criterion "Breeds with limited growth rate" aligns closely to the ECC's focus on healthy breeds. This alignment means that public procurement in practice can play a pivotal role in expanding the share of chicken meat produced under the ECC-requirements. If broadly adopted, this could lead to significant improvement in the overall welfare of chickens in Sweden, as public agencies drive demand for more ethical and sustainable practices.

THE EUROPEAN CHICKEN COMMITMENT CRITERIA:

- Compliance with EU law and regulations
- Maximum 30 kg/m² in stocking density
- Only slower growing hybrids
- Access to natural light
- Enrichment that promotes natural behaviour
- Controlled Atmosphere Stunning
- Outdoor access for more chickens
- Third party auditing

More information on the criteria and its impact on chicken welfare can be found [here](#).



Project 1882 recommendations

It is both crucial and urgent for Sweden to strengthen the protection of chickens by phasing out some of the largest chicken factories and eliminating the use of fast-growing Frankenchickens. Currently, the Swedish chicken industry acts more as a barrier than a promoter of market competition by perpetuating unsustainable and unethical practices.

The overcrowding in the chicken breeding industry must be addressed by reducing the number of chickens bred in confined conditions. The breeding of Frankenchickens should be phased out, aligning with the welfare criteria in the European Chicken Commitment (ECC).

Procuring agencies play a pivotal part in driving this change. By leveraging their purchasing power, these agencies can encourage the industry to adapt its production practices, fostering a transition towards more ethical and sustainable production.

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About project 1882:

Project 1882 works globally to make a difference for the animals that are the most exploited and suffer the worst. We have been a driving animal advocacy organization in Sweden and beyond since 1882.

Project 1882 strives for a world where animals are respected as sentient beings with the right to their own lives.



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