

Mercosur feedlot footage exposes harsh reality behind trade agreement

New video footage has exposed cattle feedlot conditions for animals raised for EU imports in Mercosur countries, revealing a multitude of animal welfare concerns. Under the EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which has started to apply as of Friday 1st May, despite no consent from the European Parliament (EP) yet, such conditions will be exacerbated.

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The footage was taken by Animal Welfare Foundation in Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil between August 2025 and March 2026 on feedlots approved for the EU-market. These countries represent three of the EU's top providers of bovine meat, with imports expected to rise significantly as tariffs under the agreement have been reduced.

Feedlots are intensive cattle fattening systems where thousands of animals are confined in outdoor pens and fed high-energy, unnatural diets, mostly grain and soy, meant to accelerate weight gain before slaughter. As evident in the video footage, these systems cause significant suffering: restricting cattles' natural behaviour and **exposing animals to heat stress, muddy and dusty conditions, disease and injuries.**

Cattle are seen **panting for air**, exposed in open air pens with insufficient shade, with **no clean drinking water** provided. During the winter months, animals were witnessed **standing and lying in mud and accumulated excrement** and contaminated water, increasing the risk of diseases, and limiting movement. Most of the animals are severely overweight, and the footage also exposes cases of severely emaciated, lame, injured, sick, and even dead animals within the large herds.

"The meat from these massive open-air feedlots is marketed as 'high-quality beef', but what we witnessed tells a very different story. The conditions are deeply distressing and would be unacceptable under EU law: thousands of animals suffer for up to 120 days before slaughter, and these are not isolated incidents, but systemic failures we documented repeatedly across the region. By importing this meat, Europe is undermining its own values", says Sabrina Gurtner, Project Manager at the Animal Welfare Foundation.

These conditions are in direct contradiction of EU animal welfare standards while they prevent a fair playing field for EU producers. Feedlots are also the major driver for

deforestation in ecosystems such as the Amazon and the Gran Chaco, responsible for habitat destruction for wild animals and biodiversity loss.

In 2024, the EU imported approximately 393,000 tonnes of bovine meat, which is equivalent to approximately 2.9 million animals. Of these imports, half originated from Mercosur countries. Under the new FTA, this figure is expected to rise with the new quota of 99,000 tonnes.

“European citizens have clearly indicated that they do not want their consumption to contribute to inhumane and unsustainable production practices in the EU and beyond the EU’s borders. The application of the EU-Mercosur agreement is another urgent reason for the EU to modernise its animal welfare legislation and ensure that it also applies to imported products,” commented **Daniel Pérez Vega, Forward for Animals Senior Project Officer, Eurogroup for Animals.**

ENDS

Notes

The agreement is currently pending assessment by the Court of Justice of the European Union. Among the central concerns is whether the agreement aligns with the EU’s precautionary principle and its established protections for public health, consumer safety, and the environment. In the meantime, the deal is applied without any Parliament in Europe having scrutinised the consequences of unconditional trade liberalisation on animals, people and the environment. The ratification by the EP can only start once and if the court rules that the agreement is compatible with EU treaties.

[Video and image assets](#): Please credit ©Animal Welfare Foundation | Tierschutzbund Zürich

Report: [The hidden cost of the EU-Mercosur agreement](#)

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Eurogroup for Animals represents over one hundred animal protection organisations in almost all EU Member States, the UK, Switzerland, Serbia, Norway, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, India, Kenya, South Africa, Thailand, Turkiye, Ukraine, United States, Venezuela and Australia. Since its foundation in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the EU to adopt higher legal standards for animal protection. Eurogroup for Animals reflects public opinion through its members and has both the scientific and technical expertise to provide authoritative advice on issues relating to animal protection. Eurogroup for Animals is a founding member of the World Federation for Animals which unites the animal protection movement at the global level.

Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) is an independent, donation-funded non-profit organisation founded in 2010 and based in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. AWF investigates and documents animal suffering in farming, transport and slaughter – in Germany and internationally – and works with authorities and policymakers to strengthen animal welfare legislation and enforcement. AWF is a member of Eurogroup for Animals.