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Aligning with global standards

A European Commission (EC) proposal in April 2025 to align Europe's animal by-product rules with world standards could signal a new era for the region's rendering industry.

The aim of the proposal is to bring EU rules more in line with World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) standards, putting the region on a level playing field with the rest of the world, according to European Fat Processors and Renderers Association (EFPPRA) president Robert Figgenger.

Europe's rendering industry has the strictest regulations in the world, introduced following the region's bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or 'mad cow disease') crisis in the 1990s.

Stringent rendering and animal by-product regulations were introduced to prevent the spread of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs), a group of rare, fatal brain diseases that affect humans and animals caused by abnormal prion proteins that lead to progressive degeneration of the brain and nervous system.

A total ban on meat and bone meal (MBM) in feed for ruminants was introduced in 1994, which was extended in 2001 to feed for all farmed animals.

'Species-to-species' recycling was prohibited, such as feeding pigs with porcine-derived proteins.

Fish meal was only allowed for non-ruminants under strict conditions.

In 2002, the Animal By-Products Regulation (EC) No 1774/2002 was also introduced – now replaced by Regulation

A European Commission proposal to eliminate overly rigid EU animal by-product rules to align more closely with global standards could pave the way for Europe to use and export more processed proteins in different feed categories

Serena Lim

(EC) No 1069/2009 – classifying animal by-products into three risk categories:

Category 1: Highest risk materials – including specified risk materials (SRMs) such as the brain, spinal cord, eyes, tonsils and intestines of ruminants (animals with four-chambered stomachs such as cows, goats and sheep). This category includes fallen stock or animals that die on farm which have not been slaughtered for human consumption which are suspected of being infected with TSEs or includes SRMs.

Category 2: Medium risk materials – including manure, digestive tract contents; and fallen stock. These materials must be sterilised if processed and can be used in biogas plants or technical products – such as oleochemicals, biodiesel and fertilisers – but not for feed.

Category 3: Lowest risk materials – parts of animals fit for human consumption but not used, such as hides, hooves, feathers and some offal; former foodstuffs no longer for human consumption; and by-products from healthy slaughtered animals like bones and skins.

These materials can be used in pet food and PAP for non-ruminant feed;

fertilisers; and technical products such as oleochemicals, biodiesel and cosmetics.

Specified risk materials (SRMs)

Dr Francisco Reviriego Gordejo, head of animal health at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) told the annual EFPPRA Congress in June that classical BSE associated with contaminated animal feed had not been identified in Europe recently, although atypical BSE not linked to feed contamination was still detected occasionally.

Figgenger said that the most remarkable part of the EC's proposal was that in countries with 'negligible BSE risk status', "no tissues shall be considered as SRM any more".

"By deciding that there is no longer any need to remove SRM, we would finally acknowledge the practical absence of BSE in Europe and, as a consequence, the practical absence of the respective risk. And if there is practically no risk, why would we any longer need the strictest precautions in the world?"

"The envisaged alignment with WOAH rules will have a significant impact on operations and markets for our industry.

"It seems that – many years after the BSE crisis – a new era is dawning. ▶

► This is the moment to think the so far unthinkable and to get aligned with the world standards.

“Let’s allow more circularity in the use of our animal by-products, also in Europe.”

Figgenger said it was time for Europe to allow the use of ruminant PAPs in animal feed (except for cattle) and aquaculture, like the rest of the world.

“These valuable proteins are currently limited to serving as a sustainable protein source in animal farming and aquaculture in third countries only.”

Lifting the ban would be a signal to countries, like Vietnam, not to mistrust the product.

Vietnam has ranked among the top 10 feed-producing countries in the world in recent years, according to the Alltech Global Feed Survey.

Category 2 meals

Figgenger said that, unlike the rest of the world, Category 2 meals are not allowed for feed use in the EU.

He said the EC should consider a relaxation of the export rules for these valuable proteins.

“These pressure-sterilised meals meet the highest biosecurity standards worldwide. That is why their export should not only be allowed as fertiliser but for all legal purposes in the country of destination, including the use as feed.”

Figgenger said that if the EU does not export these meals, feed producers outside of Europe might instead choose genetically modified soyabean meal (which is not allowed in the EU); proteins from animals that receive growth promoters and hormones; or non-sustainably sourced fish meal.

“We should not forget that 70% of the farmed fish consumed in Europe is imported – most probably fed with similar types of meals like Category 2 meals, but sourced from countries outside of Europe. And we have no problem in eating these fish.”

This issue would be even more important in the future as, under a new SRM regime, significantly higher volumes of category 2 meals would be available on the market, due to the shift of fallen stock from category 1 towards category 2.

Intraspecies recycling

Another area the EU should examine is over intraspecies recycling – the feeding of animal by-products from one species back to the same species, Figgenger told the EFPPA congress.

“While we finally feed pork PAP to poultry, and poultry PAP to pork [in 2021], intraspecies recycling is still not allowed

in Europe. In fact, intraspecies recycling is totally in line with the natural behaviour of these animals and the amino acid profile of these proteins perfectly matches the need of the animals and leads to better health.”

Figgenger said Europe was the only region in the world ignoring these facts.

All countries around the world ban ruminant-to-ruminant feed. However, countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil allow poultry-to-poultry and pig-to-pig feed.

TSE framework

Dr Gordejo of DG SANTE said that the EU TSE regulatory framework had been a

huge success in eliminating BSE in Europe and the risk was now negligible in most EU member states.

“We have a regulatory framework that is stricter than the rest of the world.”

The EC was aiming to eliminate outdated or overly rigid provisions in its review of TSE Regulation (EC) No 999/2001, which lays down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of TSEs in animals.

The goal was to preserve animal and human health and ensure a risk-based approach to BSE management, while implementing proportionate, science-based measures, and align with international

Global standards and regulations

The EU’s three-category risk system is specific to the region and is not used elsewhere in the world.

In the USA, for example, rendering is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for feed and food safety, and by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) for animal health and meat inspection. The country distinguishes between:

- Edible rendering (for food production)
- Inedible rendering (for uses such as animal feed, pet food and biofuels)

Certain high-risk materials, such as SRMs in cattle over 30 months old, are excluded from feed use but are not placed into numbered categories.

Global standards

The WOAHP (formerly the OIE – World Organisation for Animal Health) does not regulate rendering directly, but provides international standards and guidelines related to animal by-products, animal disease prevention and safe trade. While WOAHP issues guidance, it is up to individual countries to incorporate WOAHP standards into national laws. WOAHP guidelines intersect with rendering in several key areas:

Risk mitigation for transmissible diseases

The WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code specifies that SRMs must be removed, segregated and destroyed, often by incineration or high-temperature rendering. Rendering alone is not considered sufficient to inactivate the prions agents of BSE.

Countries must demonstrate:

- Effective SRM controls.
- Surveillance and traceability.
- Controls on feeding animal protein to ruminants.

Inactivation of pathogens during processing

- WOAHP recommends that rendering (or alternative treatments) must effectively inactivate pathogens of concern.
- Heat treatment is key: Typically: 133°C for 20 minutes at 3 bar pressure (known as ‘Method 1’ in EU rules).

Use of animal by-products in feed

- The WOAHP warns against feeding ruminant-derived protein to ruminants, due to BSE risk.
- For non-ruminants such as pigs, poultry and fish, the use of rendered material is allowed if the material is from healthy animals, properly processed and is traceable and not contaminated.

Safe trade of rendered products

- WOAHP provides sanitary measures for international trade in products like MBMs and tallow.
- Countries exporting such materials must certify the absence of SRMs, ensure materials are heat-treated and processed safely, and meet BSE risk status requirements.

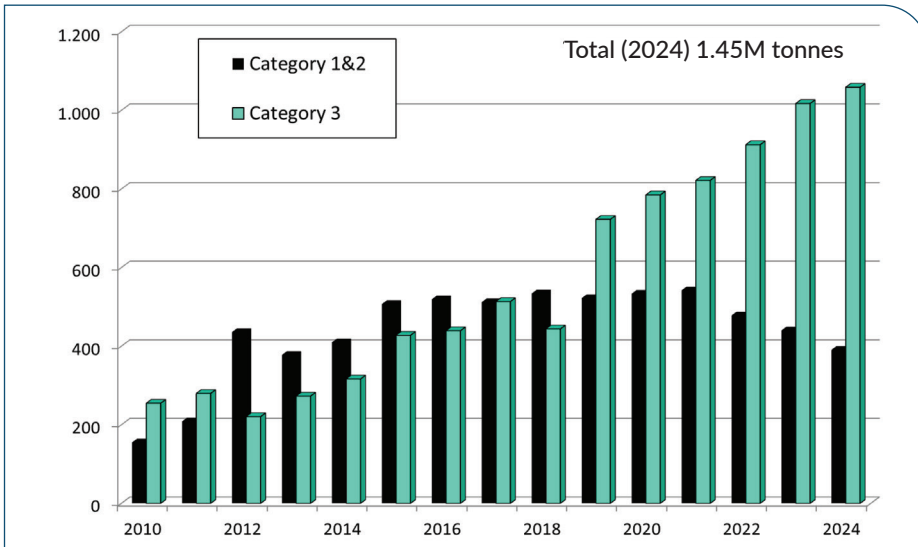


Figure 1: Category 1, 2 and 3 biofuels ('000 tonnes), 2024

Source: Dirk Dobbelaere, EFPPRA 2025 Congress

standards in the areas of risk-based surveillance, removing trade restrictions for certain commodities, updating the BSE risk determination status, and updating the list of SRMs for removal.

Any revision to the EU regulation should be scientifically sound, proportionate to the risk, and practically enforceable – there would not just be automatic alignment, Dr Gordejo said.

Practical steps in place included working groups discussions with member states on what to update and how, regular exchanges with other stakeholders; and scientific opinions from the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) to strengthen legislative updates.

Statistical overview

Dirk Dobbelaere, secretary general of EFPPRA, looked at the production and use of rendered products among the association's members, which process around 17M tonnes of raw material into

2.7M tonnes of animal fat and nearly 3.7M tonnes of animal proteins in Europe.

EFPPRA's 30 members have 446 different lines (from food to category 1) in 251 processing plants and 236 collection plants in 22 European countries.

Dobbelaere said the processing of animal by-products in Europe remained stable overall in 2024, with Category 1 and 2 processing falling 18%, and category 3 and edible fats processing rising by 6%.

The majority of the Category 1 (3.2M tonnes) and Category 2 (0.7M tonnes) of material products was combusted last year (752,000 tonnes of MBM and 18,000 tonnes of fat).

The next highest usage was in biodiesel, totalling 391,000 tonnes in 2024 compared with 440,000 tonnes in 2023.

Category 1, 2 and 3 biofuels usage remained stable at 1.45M tonnes last year (see Figure 1, above) compared with 1.46M tonnes in 2023.

The 2024 production of Category 3 materials and edible fats was 2.28M tonnes (a rise of 6% compared with 2023), with the majority going into biodiesel (more than 1M tonnes), followed by terrestrial animal feed (over 400,000 tonnes), oleochemicals and pet food (see Figure 2, below left).

Dobbelaere said all fat markets were up in 2024: oleochemical usage rising by 9% compared with 2023, feed up by 5%, pet food higher by 7%, and fish feed rising by 136%.

In the protein sector, 2.74M tonnes of PAP and food grade protein was produced in 2024, a rise of 3% against 2023, with large markets in fertiliser and pet food.

The largest proportion of protein (roughly 75% or 2.07M tonnes) went into pet food (see Figure 3, below), followed by the aqua feed sector (296,000 tonnes), which rose by 60% in 2024.

EFPPRA members exported 30% of the PAPs they produced last year, while fat exports nearly tripled from 3% to 8%.

In 2024, biodiesel was the largest market for food and feed grade fats, with a 46% market share and the sector rising by 4% against 2023. Pet food use rose by 7% but 33,000 tonnes of food and feed grade fats was still combusted last year, a rise of 29%.

Meanwhile, although animal fats and other category materials are eligible to be sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) feedstocks under the ReFuel EU Aviation regulation that came into force on 1 January, "this market has not really taken off for the time being", according to Figgenger.

As for the reason why, he told OFI "we can only speculate or report what the market says – too much imports and too low biofuel inclusion targets for aviation". ●
Serena Lim is the editor of Oils & Fats International (OFI)

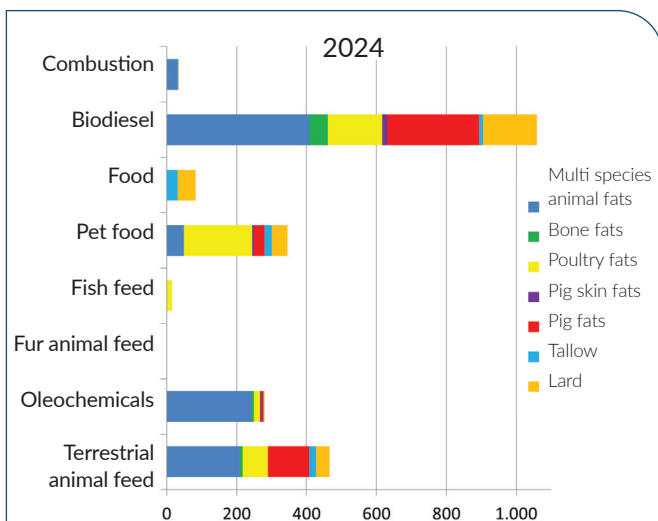


Figure 2: Destination of Category 3 & edible fats ('000 tonnes)

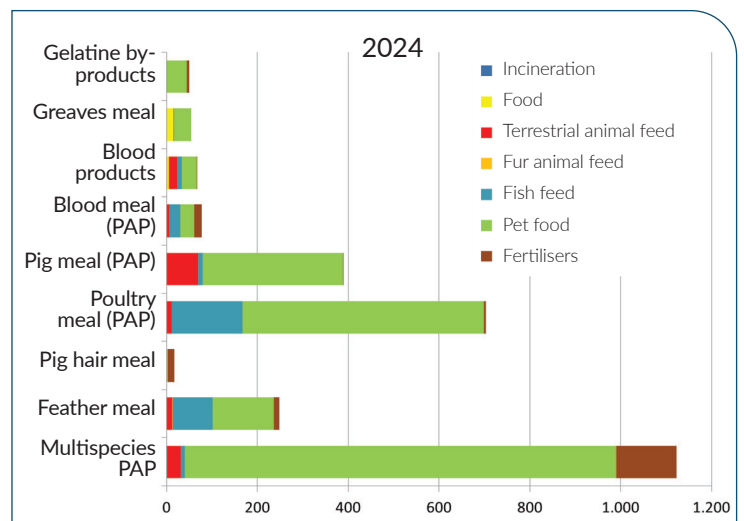


Figure 3: Destination of PAP and food grade protein ('000 tonnes)

Source: Dirk Dobbelaere, EFPPRA 2024 Congress