



Position Paper of FOUR PAWS

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## SOLUTION CONCEPTS FOR DAIRY FARMS IN ORDER TO END THE TRANSPORT OF UNWEANED CALVES

February 2022

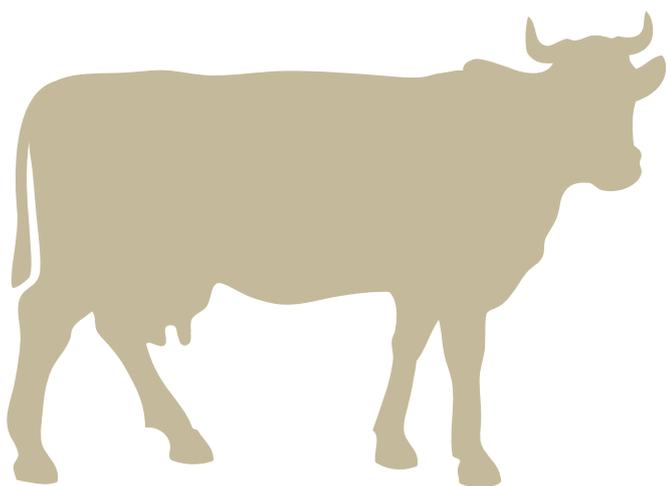
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## INTRODUCTION

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Cows only give milk when they have given birth to a calf. Dairy cows on farms are therefore usually inseminated each year, resulting into more than 21 million calves born from dairy cows in the EU annually. From an economic perspective the male and a certain percentage of the female calves of the dairy breeds are however almost worthless, because they do not gain much weight to eventually produce an economically relevant amount of meat. Therefore, calves are transported across borders over long distances. In 2019, around 1.5 million unweaned calves were transported across Member States.<sup>1</sup> In the dairy industry, unweaned calves that are still dependent on a milk diet are sold to livestock traders from the early age of 14 days and taken to assembly centers. At the assembly centers and during transport, they are mixed with many other calves from different farms of origin. This is very stressful and detrimental to the health of the very young animals, which do not yet have a functioning immune system. The prophylactic administration of antibiotics is therefore common practice.<sup>2</sup>

Before calves are transferred from an assembly center to a long-distance transport for further transportation to various EU countries, they usually receive only water or electrolytes, and in rare cases also milk replacer. From the assembly centers the transport then continues to various EU countries. The young animals are allowed to be transported for 19 hours at a stretch without unloading. They suffer from hunger and thirst. This is because unweaned calves are still dependent on a milk diet and cannot yet feed on roughage such as hay. However, milk feeding is not possible on the transport vehicles. At the "destination" however, which in many cases is only a distribution center for contracted farms to more or less distant destinations, the animals again only receive electrolytes. All this results in animals often remaining without feed for up to 30 hours.<sup>3</sup> Water supply is also problematic, as the drinkers on the trucks are not designed for the needs of calves: they operate with overpressure, so that the water sprays out with pressure when the valve is activated. However, calves that are not weaned, are not able to be watered in this way, because at such a young age they can only absorb liquid by sucking (e.g., with the help of a rubber teat).



<sup>1</sup> Velarde et al., 2021: Particular welfare needs in animal transport: unweaned animals and pregnant females. A study requested by the ANIT Committee

<sup>2</sup> 16. AMG Novelle Bericht BMEL

<sup>3</sup> Rabitsch und Marahrens, 2020: Anmerkungen zum Transport nicht-entwöhnter Kälber

# MINIMUM TRANSPORT AGE OF UNWEANED CALVES

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In Germany, under the new Animal Welfare Transport Regulation, the minimum age at which young calves may be transported has been raised from 14 to 28 days as of January 2022. The transition period was set for one year, meaning the regulation must be implemented by January 2023. The current EU transport regulation is about to be revised. Raising the minimum age for transport in unweaned calves was also discussed in the Committee of Inquiry on the Protection of Animals during Transport (ANIT) and the plenary vote that followed. The parliament proposed introducing a minimum age of 28 days, which is insufficient from an animal welfare point of view.

In Germany the increased minimum age for the transport of calves will result in calves remaining on the dairy farms for a longer time. The male calves and some of the female calves will remain on the farm of origin for at least 14 more days. Therefore, the previous management on most dairy farms will have to change. This requires solutions because sometimes there is not enough space available on the farms, which are usually fully stocked. Also, the additional rearing time generates additional costs. Currently, farmers seem to be reacting by planning the purchase of more single calf pens. But the basic problem is the high number of calves and the fact that these calves are of little economic value. This is the main cause why farmers show little interest in keeping the calves even longer, and this aspect must be considered and addressed in this context. From an animal welfare point of view, transport from 28 days of age is also highly problematic, because even at 28 days of age the immune system of calves is not yet fully developed<sup>4</sup> and the animals are still dependent on a milk diet until they are 12 weeks old.<sup>5</sup> Calves should therefore only be transported after weaning.<sup>6</sup> A minimum transport age of 12 weeks would result in these animals remaining on the farm of origin for an even longer period of time.



**This position paper shows a possible short-term and a long-term solution in case of a transport ban of unweaned calves with a minimum stay of three months on the farm of origin.**

<sup>4</sup> FiBL Merkblatt, 2021: Artgerechte Kälbermast und Aufzucht von Mastremonten

<sup>5</sup> Eurogroup for Animals, 2021: Live animal transport – time to change the rules (S.18)

<sup>6</sup> Velarde et al., 2021: Particular welfare needs in animal transport: unweaned animals and pregnant females. A study requested by the ANIT Committee (S.24)

# SHORT-TERM SOLUTION FOR LOWERING THE NUMBER OF CALVES

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## REDUCTION DUE TO EXTENDED INTERCALVING PERIOD

The cross-border transport of calves to other EU countries for fattening and for the partial subsequent export to third countries has developed as a result of massive "animal production" or animal overproduction. The misconception that a cow must give birth to a calf every year in order to be able to give sufficient milk persists. However, this does not correspond to the facts.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this approach is still common practice. Farms have been advised for decades and are still being advised today to inseminate cows every year. The reason lies in the focus on maximum profit and in the assumption that the milk yield would otherwise be too low shortly before the next birth. This is because the milk yield of a cow is always highest in the first few weeks after the birth of the calf and then drops continuously over the months. However, the procedure of annual insemination should be viewed critically for the reasons listed below.

About six to eight weeks before the expected parturition, dairy cows are stopped being milked in order to allow their bodies to prepare for birth. This abrupt cessation of milking is called "drying-off." However, at the time of drying off, the milk yield of most animals is still enormously high. This means that such farms suddenly stop milking their cows despite a high milk yield of, e.g., 30 liters.<sup>8</sup> This results in acute stress for the cattle, as udder pressure increases massively. To prevent a resulting udder inflammation, antibiotics are used. Drying-off at such a high milk yield not only puts a strain on the cow's metabolism and threatens her health, but each birth is by itself extremely stressful and depletes the cow's reserves. It would be healthier for the animals if they were inseminated only once every 18 months instead of once a year, for example. As a result, at least one third fewer calves would be born, which would inevitably also lead to fewer "surplus" calves that would be transported. Scheduling the next calf can be planned in such a way that insemination takes place later and the intercalving period (the time between two parturitions) is extended.

## HEALTH ASPECTS

The current high-yield breeds with the aim of producing immense amounts of milk and the associated annual insemination are contrary to the maintenance of animal health and the goal of the animals' longevity. For example, it is nowadays considered normal that cows are slaughtered at the age of five (after three lactations) and replaced by a new cow, even though cattle can live up to 20 years.<sup>9</sup>

Breeders and livestock owners should rethink this: a stronger focus on extensive milk production, longevity and a longer intercalving period will lead to healthier cows and a lower number of calves resulting from dairy production in the long term.

Since only about one third of calves is needed to maintain the dairy herd, a different insemination management system not only reduces the number of calves that are exported, but also the number of "surplus" female calves. The lower the milk yield at drying-off, the better the cow's body can cope with the milking stop at dry-off, and antibiotics do not necessarily have to be used.

<sup>7</sup> Römer, 2021: Verlängerte Zwischenkalbezeit.

<sup>8</sup> Hünnes, 2021: "Mehr Tierwohl durch schrittweises Trockenstellen?" vetconsult

<sup>9</sup> FOUR PAWS, 2018: The life expectancy of farm animals

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## ECONOMIC ASPECTS FOR FARMERS

Apart from the fact that an enormously high milk yield places a heavy burden on the cow's physical reserves and therefore breeding for more extensive milk production should be prioritized, it also does not make sense from an economic point of view. When drying off cows with 30 liters of daily milk yield, farmers forego this milk, even though there is no need to inseminate cows every year. A prolonged intercalving period is already practiced by some farmers and, according to their statements, even has a positive financial impact on the farm.<sup>10</sup> The costs of prophylactic antibiotics can be partially saved by re-inseminating cows later and dry them off with a lower daily milk yield. The milking phase is prolonged by a later insemination time, which may be financially worthwhile for the farms.<sup>11</sup>

For example, farms that do not inseminate again until after a waiting period of 120 to 180 days report cows even get pregnant better and stay healthier for longer.<sup>12</sup> By extending the life of the cows, these farms can produce more milk overall. Another benefit is that farmers can spend more time caring for calves, as the number of calves born is lower. By applying this method, the farms even create more space which can be used for a longer duration of keeping calves on the farm.

Overall, however, EU policy should include accompanying measures that make it more financially rewarding for farms to “produce” less milk and fewer calves. After all, the EU produces too much milk and too many calves that are kept, transported, and exported under unacceptable conditions. Moreover, this type of production for maximum profit results in a high number of sick animals, both in dairy cows and calves.

**FOUR PAWS believes the best solution is to generally reduce the number of farm animals, use extensive dual-purpose instead of high-yielding breeds, and practice a more extensive insemination management.**

<sup>10</sup> Netzwerk Fokus Tierwohl, 2022: Podcast Netzwerk Fokus Tierwohl

<sup>11</sup> Greil und Dorsch, 2021: Die Zwischenkalbezeit verlängern – das bringt´s! Top agrar

<sup>12</sup> Römer und Losand, 2019: Die Laktation verlängern durch eine bewusst spätere Besamung – Vorteile und Risiken. Proteinmarkt

# CALF REARING

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## COMMON PRACTICE DAIRY CALF REARING

In dairy farming, calves are normally separated from their mothers from the first day after birth. On some farms, the first milk known as colostrum is often forcibly fed to the calves for reasons of efficiency: the so-called “drenching”<sup>13</sup> of calves means a plastic tube is inserted into the esophagus of the newborn calves in order to transfer the first milk into the digestive tract. This procedure should actually only be undertaken by a veterinarian and only in an emergency case, such as when the suckling reflex of the newborn calf fails. However, since the procedure is routinely performed on some large farms by lay persons which are no veterinarians, there is a high risk for complications such as pneumonia, from which the calves can die.

On almost all dairy farms, calves are usually fed twice a day by bucket-feeding with milk or milk replacer. This practice contradicts the physiological requirements of the calf, since calves normally drink from the mother’s udder about six to eight times a day in small sips during the first weeks of life. Sucking on the teats produces saliva, which is important for the digestion. In addition, the milk from the mother cow contains vital antibodies for the calf. The usual feeding intervals of twice a day lead to diarrhea in most calves, which can quickly become life-threatening at such a young age.

Dairy cattle farms generally keep calves individually for the first weeks of life, usually in so-called calf pens or calf igloos. Calf igloos are small individual pens made of plastic, which include a small fenced-off enclosure in front of the pen, where the feeding bucket is hung in. Calf pens usually do not have an outdoor enclosure in front. In the calf igloos or pens, there are often no sucker-feeding buckets with rubber nipples that are hung in for feeding. Instead, the animals must drink the milk from the top of the bucket. This is only possible by slurping and is completely against their nature. It increases the risk of diarrheal diseases. For the animals, the solitary confinement in the igloos or pens means not only to be isolated from their mother but also to have no other contact with conspecifics of the same age.

From an animal welfare point of view this is a torment for the otherwise very social animals: they experience neither protection nor security in there, nor can they learn social interaction. For this reason, calf pens and similar individual housings are being critically discussed at EU level, particularly with regard to the European citizens’ initiative “End the Cage Age”.



The European Commission has already announced that it will submit a legislative proposal by 2023 to abolish the use of cages and the individual housing of calves. It therefore makes no economic sense to invest in calf pens and crates. Instead, farms should “produce” fewer calves. From an animal welfare perspective calves should stay with their mothers for the first few months. As a short-term solution, animals should at least be kept in pairs or groups.

<sup>13</sup> FOUR PAWS, 2021: The suffering of calves

# SHORT-TERM SOLUTION FOR CALF REARING

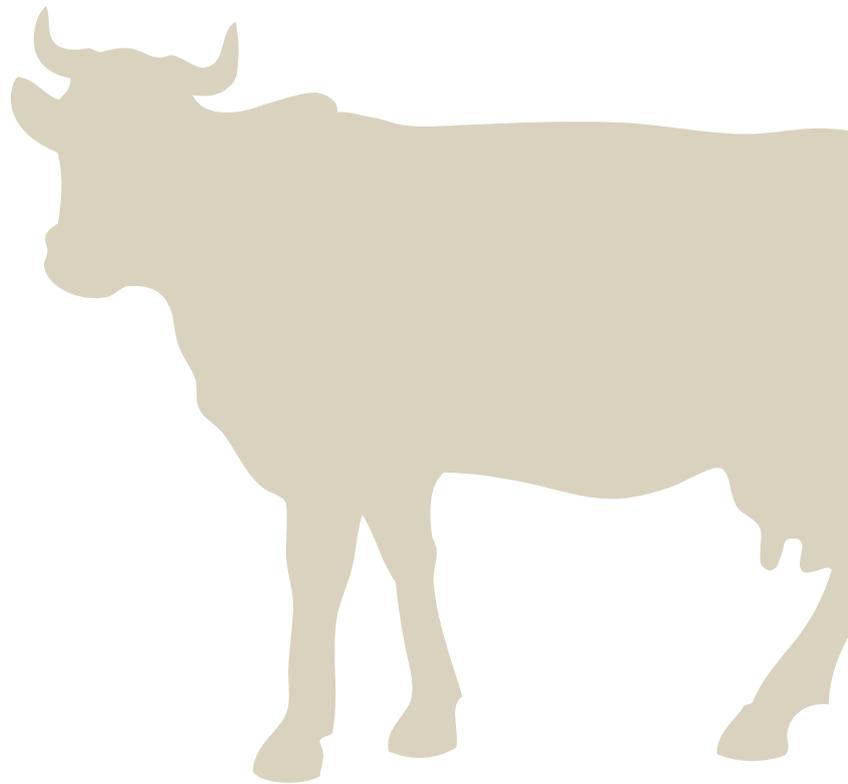
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## CONVERSION MEASURES / INVESTMENTS IN CALF HOUSING

If calf transports are only allowed from the age of 28 days – as is the case in Germany soon – the question arises as to how the animals are to be housed on the farms. Even if the farmers have already reduced the number of calves through better management of insemination, the welfare-unfriendly calf rearing remains. The purchase of individual calf pens or calf igloos on the farms should not take place for the reasons mentioned above. Calves should no longer be kept alone as has been the case up to now, but at least in pairs or small groups.

In order to turn the single igloos that now exist into double igloos, it is possible, for example, to connect two igloos and to remove the middle wall of the outdoor enclosure. In this way, two calves can use the run together and social behavior is possible. Larger hutches for two or more animals are better than two narrow single igloos. Calves, being herd animals, do not like to be alone and develop better when they grow up at least in pairs from their first day of life.<sup>14</sup> Two calf pens without an outdoor enclosure can be connected to each other by placing them next to each other and removing the middle walls. If this is not feasible on some farms, the calves should at least not be kept individually for the full 28 days, but be transferred to group housing at the latest after the first week of life. Group housing is always present on dairy farms (i.e. for the female calves that remain on the farm and become the future dairy cows). The decreased number of calves due to a more extensive insemination management creates additional space.

The fear that calves will suckle each other if they are kept together is justified. This is because the animals have a strong need to suckle, which remains chronically unsatisfied if the animals do not drink freely from the udder of their mothers. More frequent and shorter feeding intervals or a constant milk feeding supply by an ad libitum drinker can prevent mutual suckling. In a group housing with freely available milk feeding animals at least have the opportunity to drink several times a day, in order to satisfy their intensive sucking needs. However, the better solution is to let calves grow up with their mothers.<sup>15</sup> In any case, the calves should be offered free access to water and roughage from the first weeks of life.



<sup>14</sup> Unser Land, 2022: Geht es auch in Zweier-Iglus? ARD Mediathek

<sup>15</sup> Roth et al., 2009: Influence of artificial vs. mother-bonded rearing on sucking behaviour, health and weight gain in calves. Appl.Anim.Behav.Sci.

# LONG-TERM SOLUTION FOR DAIRY CATTLE FARMING

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## CONVERSION TO MOTHER-BONDED CALF REARING

From an animal welfare point of view, young animals that are still dependent on a milk diet should stay with their mothers as long as possible. Physiologically, calves are dependent on milk for the first three months and can only feed on solid feed thereafter. In a natural environment, calves would stay with their mothers for about eight to ten months. The weaning process would take place gradually, concerning both physical and psychological separation from their mothers. In dairy cattle husbandry, calves should therefore stay with their mothers for at least the first three months.<sup>16</sup> This can be achieved by a more animal-friendly system such as the mother-bonded rearing. In this way a mother-child bond can develop, and the calves can experience natural nutrition by sucking on their mother's udder, which allows them to grow up healthily. The use of antibiotics can thus be reduced.<sup>17</sup>

The calf should be able to be by its mother's side throughout the day and take in small portions of milk from the mother cow's udder several times a day. Since most dairy cows in the EU give more milk than the calf can take in anyway, additional milking of these cows can be done once or twice a day. There are already some farms that practice this management and even make more profit, partly because they achieve a higher price through clever marketing.<sup>18</sup>

Mother-bonded calf rearing is possible for both pure dairy breeds and dual-purpose breeds. Dual-purpose breeds, however, are generally more robust, give less milk, but the male calves produce more meat than calves of pure dairy breeds and can be fattened locally. Institutes such as the Swiss Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and the Research Institute for Organic Agriculture (Thünen Institute) are working on the form of cow-bonded calf rearing.<sup>19</sup> With the support of FOUR PAWS, FiBL has compiled practical reports from farms that practice mother-bonded and fostered calf rearing in a leaflet.<sup>20</sup> There are already farms that are changing their animal husbandry to a sanctuary, by no longer re-inseminating cows.<sup>21</sup> This is because many farmer families want to get away from the pressures of conventional livestock farming. The cattle there are no longer slaughtered but are allowed to live until they die of old age or are euthanised. Such sanctuaries are usually financed through donations and sponsorships.



<sup>16</sup> Schneider et al., 2021: Trennen und Absetzen von Kälbern in der kuhgebundenen Aufzucht. CORE Organic. ProYoungStock

<sup>17</sup> CowPassion & Fachstelle MuKa, 2021: Entwicklung des Immunsystems bei Kälbern und der Absetzzeitpunkt in der Mutter-Kalbhaltung

<sup>18</sup> "Muttergebundene Kälberaufzucht - Elternzeit für Kühe". NDR Doku

<sup>19</sup> Thünen-Institut: Die Kälber wieder bei den Müttern lassen

<sup>20</sup> Merkblatt, 2018: Mutter- und ammengebundene Kälberaufzucht in der Milchviehhaltung. FiBL

<sup>21</sup> Bruffhof

# FOUR PAWS DEMANDS

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## LEGAL LEVEL

- **Transport ban on unweaned animals** that are still dependent on a milk diet
- **Ban on animal transports to third countries**
- **Cancellation of export agreements** that include live animals
- **Prohibition of long-distance transports** over eight hours
- **Setting a minimum transport age of three months** for calves, lambs and yearlings, **30 days** for piglets, and **six weeks** for rabbits
- **Setting high husbandry standards** for unweaned animals (calves, lambs, yearlings, piglets, rabbits) **with soft bedding, more space, access to exercise/pasture, prohibition of mutilations**
- Support the shift **to mother-bonded rearing**
- Compulsory **intake of mother's milk by suckling**
- **Elimination of subsidies** that stimulate increased animal production
- **Limitations on livestock concentration** in animal husbandry

## REDUCTION OF ANIMAL PRODUCTION

- **Develop strategies to reduce the number of dairy cows** less focus on high production yields, more focus on health and longevity
- **Reduction of the number of calves and dairy cows**, e.g. through extended intercalving periods
- **Support farms that reduce their dairy cattle numbers**
- **Animal "production" should be greatly reduced** and, if possible, replaced by the production of plant-based products

## IMPROVED ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

- **Shifting to dual-purpose breeds**, where the male calves can be better used for fattening, and the female cows have a lower milk yield but a longer life expectancy
- **Mother-bonded rearing** of calves, lambs and yearlings under high animal welfare standards
- **Group housing with bedding**
- **Species-appropriate feeding** (several times a day, warm cow's milk, preferably by sucking on the udder of the mother cow)
- **Local fattening until at least 18-24 months of age.** Support the conversion to husbandry with high animal welfare standards
- **Establish platforms for farmers to exchange information** on alternatives such as mother-bonded rearing
- **Develop local fattening and local slaughter structures with highest animal welfare standards**

## ANNEX

### LIST OF SELECTED FARMS (which keep calves on the farm for a longer period of time or practice cow-bonded rearing)

Name of the farm	Website
Hofgut Eichigt	<a href="https://www.hofgut-eichigt.de/">https://www.hofgut-eichigt.de/</a>
Erlenhof	<a href="https://www.unser-erlenhof.de/unser-erlenhof/">https://www.unser-erlenhof.de/unser-erlenhof/</a>
Hof Gasswies	<a href="https://hof-gasswies.de">https://hof-gasswies.de</a>
Kuh plus Kalb	<a href="https://kuhpluskalb.de/">https://kuhpluskalb.de/</a>
Hofgut Rengoldshausen	<a href="http://www.rengo.de">www.rengo.de</a> YouTube
De Oekomelkburen	<a href="https://deoekomelkburen.de">https://deoekomelkburen.de</a>
Schweisfurth-Stiftung	<a href="https://schweisfurth-stiftung.de">https://schweisfurth-stiftung.de</a>
Hof Stolze Kuh	<a href="https://stolzekuh.de/">https://stolzekuh.de/</a>
Geschwisterkalb-Initiative Tiggeshof	<a href="https://erlebnisbauernhof-sauerland.de">https://erlebnisbauernhof-sauerland.de</a>

**MORE INFORMATION** about mother-bonded calf rearing can be found here:

[www.four-paws.org/campaigns-topics/topics/farm-animals/mother-bonded-calf-rearing](http://www.four-paws.org/campaigns-topics/topics/farm-animals/mother-bonded-calf-rearing)

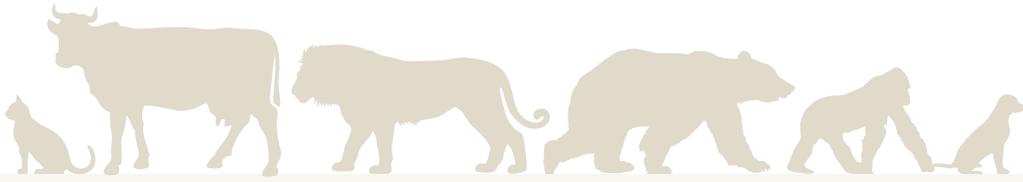
Name of the sanctuary	Website
Bruffhof	<a href="https://www.bruffhof.com/tiere-auf-dem-bruffhof/">https://www.bruffhof.com/tiere-auf-dem-bruffhof/</a>
Hagelhof	<a href="https://www.hagelhof.de/kuehe/">https://www.hagelhof.de/kuehe/</a>
Hof Butenland	<a href="https://www.stiftung-fuer-tierschutz.de/">https://www.stiftung-fuer-tierschutz.de/</a>
Initiative Lebenstiere	<a href="https://www.lebenskuehe.de/">https://www.lebenskuehe.de/</a>
Lebenshof Bergwaldhof	<a href="https://www.bergwaldhof-1.de/Pensionshof-fuer-Kuehe">https://www.bergwaldhof-1.de/Pensionshof-fuer-Kuehe</a>
Lebenshof Hohenwart	<a href="https://www.lebenshof-hohenwart.de/tiere/rinder/">https://www.lebenshof-hohenwart.de/tiere/rinder/</a>
MuKa + Lebenshof	<a href="https://cowpassion.ch/markt/mukale/">https://cowpassion.ch/markt/mukale/</a>

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## ABOUT FOUR PAWS

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them. Founded in 1988 in Vienna by Heli Dungler and friends, the organisation advocates for a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding. The sustainable campaigns and projects of FOUR PAWS focus on companion animals including stray dogs and cats, farm animals and wild animals – such as bears, big cats and orangutans – kept in inappropriate conditions as well as in disaster and conflict zones. With offices in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, the UK, the USA and Vietnam as well as sanctuaries for rescued animals in eleven countries, FOUR PAWS provides rapid help and long-term solutions.



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