

Questionnaire on the Initiative Tierwohl for Cattle

Below is a compilation of frequently asked questions and answers regarding participation in the Initiative Tierwohl for cattle farmers.

How and when can I register to participate in the Initiative Tierwohl?

Registration for the Initiative Tierwohl always takes place through a coordinator. To do so, cattle farmers must complete the declaration of participation, including the attachments available on the website, and send it to their coordinator. The coordinator will then register the farmer in the database. Registration is possible at any time.

Is there a list of coordinators participating in the Initiative Tierwohl?

Yes, all coordinators who have registered for the Initiative Tierwohl are listed in [the download section](#). A coordinator can then be selected from this list. Farms are free to choose whether they wish to work with the same coordinator as for their participation in the QS system or whether they prefer to select a different coordinator.

How long can one participate in the Initiative Tierwohl?

Participation in the Initiative Tierwohl is open-ended. Ordinary termination is possible at any time with three months' notice.

What is an implementation date, and when must the criteria be met?

The implementation date is the start date from which the farm must fully meet all criteria. From this date, the certification body may conduct a program audit (initial audit).

The implementation date can be chosen individually and freely.

Note: The criteria do not need to be met at the time of registration; the obligation to comply begins on the implementation date.

Which criteria must I meet?

The requirements for livestock producers are described in the respective criteria catalogs and accompanying explanations (see [download area](#)). A basic prerequisite is participation in the QS system. Selected criteria from the QS guidelines form the basic criteria of the ITW. In addition, there are animal welfare criteria, such as "Increased space allowance," "training measures," and "intensified veterinary herd management." For cattle production, the criteria catalog and explanations are structured in a modular format. The basic requirements must be met by all participating farms. Depending on which program the farm wishes to participate in, the specific criteria of that program must also be met in addition to the basic requirements.

A revision of the criteria catalogs is planned for 2027.

What must be implemented for the new "Frischlufstall" and "Auslauf/ Weide" programs under the Initiative Tierwohl? Can all cattle farmers participate?

Participation in the *Frischlufstall* and *Auslauf/ Weide* programs is currently limited to cattle feedlot operations.

The industry has decided to offer three programs for the Initiative Tierwohl for cattle production with increasing levels of animal welfare:

- *Stall plus Platz*
- *Frischlufstall*
- *Auslauf/ Weide*

The programs correspond to Levels 2, 3, and 4 of the *system for the uniform labeling of housing types*.

The programs build on one another, so that, for example, eligibility for the "*Auslauf/ Weide*" program requires eligibility for the "*Stall plus Platz*" and "*Frischlufstall*" programs. The same basic requirements must be met in each program.

To achieve the *Frischlufstall* program, in addition to the basic requirements, criteria such as increased space and additional requirements regarding outdoor environmental stimuli must be met.

For "*Auslauf/ Weide*," outdoor access or pasture must also be available, and there are requirements regarding sclerotherapy of horn systems and soft lying areas, for example.

For *Frischlufstall* and *Auslauf/ Weide*, there is an additional "feeding" criterion as a supplementary module. This must be implemented by all farms for classification under the housing type label. Otherwise, products bearing the ITW seal cannot be additionally labeled with the housing type.

Detailed information on the criteria can be found in [the download section](#) of the ITW website.

What do the basic requirements for cattle production entail?

The basic requirements must be implemented by all farms, regardless of the program. These include requirements that have been in place for years. Additionally, starting July 1, 2027, all farms must provide opportunities for cattle to rub themselves as part of the basic requirements. A QS supplier authorization remains a prerequisite for every program.

How many audits are conducted?

In 2026, one program audit must be conducted per calendar year. In addition, a completely unannounced inventory check will be conducted at one-third of the farms per calendar year. The certification body will decide which farms are subject to this check. If a farm participates for less than 6 months in 2026, no inventory check needs to be conducted at that farm during that year.

In 2027, there will be a comprehensive revision of the audit system for cattle. This will be communicated in a timely manner through the appropriate channels (circulars/website).

Are the audits unannounced?

Yes, all animal welfare audits are unannounced (contact is made for program audits no more than 24 hours in advance). This also applies to the first audit at the start of participation, although in this case the livestock owner specifies the implementation date—the point at which they will comply with the criteria and are thus ready for the audit.

Herd inspections are conducted completely unannounced.

Can a cattle feedlot already participating in the program switch to a higher or lower program?

Yes, that is possible. To do so, the coordinator must register the operation for the higher or lower ITW program in the ITW database, and a new participation declaration must be signed. When switching to a different program, an implementation date is specified from which the operation will comply with the criteria of the new program.

When switching to a higher-level program, an additional audit is conducted starting from the transition date to verify that the additional criteria for the program are being met. If the operation has already undergone a program audit that year, a shortened audit is sufficient for the switch (so-called “switch audits”). In this audit, only the additional criteria of the higher-level program are checked. A stock check is not sufficient for the switch. Once the audit has been approved, the farm receives authorization to supply under the new program.

When switching to a lower-level program, a final transition audit must be conducted. The transition date—the date on which the facility wishes to participate in the lower-level program—can be set no sooner than three months in the future. During these three months, a final transition audit must verify that the requirements of the higher-level program have been met up until the transition date. A status check is not sufficient for the transition. Once the transition date is reached, the business is then only authorized to supply under the lower-level program.

If a full program audit is conducted for the transition to a higher-level program, this audit may be used as the annual audit.

How is the animal welfare premium paid out?

Livestock owners receive a price premium from the participating ITW slaughterhouse on top of the market price for animals accepted as ITW animals and slaughtered or marketed. For beef cattle feedlots, the committees have issued a recommendation regarding the amount of the price premium. This currently stands at 10.70 cents per kg of slaughter weight. Once the ‘scrubbing device’ criterion comes into force on 1 July 2027, this recommendation will increase to 12.83 cents per kg of slaughter weight. For the *Frischlufstall* and *Auslauf/ Weide* programs, there is no recommendation regarding the amount of the price premium. The amount of the price premium is freely negotiated between the livestock owner and their buyer.

For dairy farms, a recommendation of 4 cents per kg of slaughter weight has been issued for ITW slaughter cows. No recommendation has been issued for calf production farms and suckler cow farms (for the delivery of slaughter cows). The actual price premium must be negotiated bilaterally between the livestock owner and the buyer.

Important: Livestock owners should always contact their marketers, slaughterhouses, or livestock dealers early and proactively to coordinate the delivery of ITW animals—thereby ensuring that an animal welfare premium is paid. Simply delivering ITW animals to an ITW slaughterhouse does not automatically result in payment of the premium. Livestock owners and slaughterhouses must agree on the delivery of ITW animals and the terms of delivery.

Which livestock owners can participate?

Beef cattle feedlots register under production type 1001 *Beef Cattle Production*, the Beef Cattle Production Criteria Catalog applies to them.

Calf production farmers register under production type 1002 *Calf Production*; the Calf Production Criteria Catalog applies to them.

Dairy farmers are advised to register all their animals: under production type 1008 *Dairy Farming* (Dairy Farming Criteria Catalog) for the marketing of slaughter cows, and under production type 1001 *Beef Cattle Production* (Beef Cattle Production Criteria Catalog) so that heifers can also be marketed.

Suckler cow farms register under production type 1016 (*suckler/foster cow farming with calves*) and can market their slaughter cows through this production type. To market fattening cattle as well, production type 1001 (beef cattle production) must also be registered; the criteria list for cattle fattening also applies to suckler cow farms.

Do dairy farms also receive a price premium for their milk?

No. Dairy farms participating in the ITW do not receive an animal welfare premium for milk because the ITW Cattle program focuses on the meat supply chain.

To receive compensation for the milk as well, dairy farmers should contact their dairy or the providers of animal welfare programs for dairy farmers.

Dairy farms participating in a program recognized by the ITW can supply their slaughter cows to the ITW program. It is important that the respective program operator ensures that all necessary data is available in the ITW database. An additional ITW inspection is then not necessary for the marketing of slaughter cows.

Currently, the QM+, QM++, and QM+++ programs are recognized for the delivery of ITW cull cows from appropriately certified farms.

Important: If other animals from a dairy farm are also to be marketed as ITW animals (e.g., heifers or bulls), direct participation in the ITW Cattle program is required (production type 1001 Cattle Production). In this case, the Cattle Production Criteria Catalog must be implemented.

What needs to be considered when participation in the Initiative Tierwohl is terminated?

Participation in the ITW can be terminated at any time with three months' notice to the end of the month.

To withdraw from the Initiative Tierwohl, a final program audit must be conducted to confirm compliance with the criteria through the end of participation. Proof of continuing education for the current calendar year must already be available for this audit. Additionally, the barns must still be occupied. The audit must be conducted within a period ranging from no earlier than three months before the withdrawal date to no later than two weeks after the withdrawal date.

If a farm withdraws without a final program audit, a contractual penalty may be imposed.

What happens if an audit is not passed?

If a livestock owner fails an animal welfare audit, their participation in the Initiative Tierwohl is terminated. In addition, the sponsoring organization may impose a contractual penalty for each failing grade. The livestock owner has the option to file an appeal against both the certification decision (with the certification body) and the contractual penalty (with the sponsoring organization). In the event of a failed audit, the sponsoring organization will provide written information regarding the appeal options.

After failing an audit, cattle farms may re-register for the Initiative Tierwohl and, as a rule, participate again once the issues that led to the non-compliance have been resolved. In the event of serious non-compliance issues related to animal welfare identified during the audit, the sponsoring organization may impose a temporary or permanent suspension and refuse readmission.

In cattle production, when participating in *the Frischluftstall* or *Auslauf/ Weide* categories, a distinction must be made between a "K.O." in the basic requirements and a "K.O." in the program's additional requirements.

If a cattle feeder receives a "K.O." rating in a basic requirement or for *Stall plus Platz*, participation in the Initiative Tierwohl is terminated. The rights associated with participation are forfeited for the future.

If a "K.O." rating is received for an additional requirement regarding *Frischluftstall* or *Auslauf/ Weide*, participation in that specific program ends; however, the livestock owner may continue to participate in the lower-level program. Prerequisite: The audit must have demonstrated compliance with the basic requirements and the requirements of the lower-level program.

After failing an audit, farms can generally reapply to the Initiative Tierwohl. A full program audit must be conducted for the "new" participation. Example: If a farm was downgraded by only one program due to a "K.O." assessment, it can be re-registered for the higher program. To do so, the coordinator must submit a program change request, including a new implementation date. For the program change, only a shortened audit (known as a change audit) is required, in which only the additional requirements of the higher program are assessed.

Corrective Actions for Basic Quality Assurance Criteria – What Needs to Be Considered?

Corrective actions with deadlines can be agreed upon for all basic criteria. If a corrective action is agreed upon, the operation continues to participate in the ITW. The corrective actions must be implemented by the deadline. The nonconformities must be rectified by the livestock owner without delay, which is why the shortest possible deadline must be agreed upon for implementing the actions.

Please note: From the time the audit report is released until the certification body has closed the corrective action, the site is not authorized to supply ITW.

What happens if the operational structure changes?

If the operational structure changes—e.g., due to a change in the farm manager or owner—or if other certification-related changes occur, such as the use of new barns (or barn sections) or an increase in livestock numbers, the livestock owner must contact their coordinator, who will then inform the certification body. The certification body then decides whether an additional program audit is necessary.

In principle, all criteria must always be met for all animals and all areas of the registered farm (VVVO number, production type), including new farm sections and additional animals. To receive a price premium for the changed animal numbers, the livestock owner must contact their slaughterhouse or buyer directly.

What steps must be taken if the operator of a registered farm changes?

Any changes that affect the contract, the size of the livestock herd, or the criteria must be reported to ITW immediately through the coordinator. The coordinator can update the data in the database.

If the farm is leased or sold, participation in the ITW can be transferred to the next owner. The new operator must sign a new participation agreement with the coordinator and have an audit conducted after the takeover, as the responsible person is changing.

What happens if a registered farm is divided or two participating farms are merged?

Requests for farm splits or mergers can be submitted through the coordinator in the database. If the farm split or merger results in changes to the number of animals, this must be justified in the application. In the event of structural changes or a change in management, the certification body may decide to conduct an additional program audit to verify the changes.

Note: Farms that are suspended and therefore do not have ITW delivery authorization cannot be split or merged.

Where may the animals be marketed?

Every livestock owner is free to market their animals. There is no obligation to deliver to an ITW farm.

A feeder also has no obligation to deliver to a slaughterhouse participating in the Initiative Tierwohl. However, an animal welfare premium is paid only for animals delivered to an ITW slaughterhouse with which an agreement for the delivery of ITW animals has been made.

Which slaughterhouses participate in the Initiative Tierwohl?

All slaughterhouses approved for the Initiative Tierwohl can be found using the [public search function](#) (Slaughter and Cutting stage) on the homepage of the Animal Welfare Database. Here, you can either search for specific slaughterhouses or click the "Search" button to view a list of all eligible slaughterhouses without entering search criteria.

Can farms that fatten heifers or steers also participate in the ITW?

Yes, these farms can register under production type 1001 *Cattle Production*.

What should be considered in the event of a vacancy?

Vacancies should be reported to the cluster coordinator. The coordinator will inform the certification body, as no audits can be conducted while there are no animals on the farm. As soon as animals are brought back onto the farm, this must also be reported to the cluster coordinator, who will in turn pass the information on to the certification body. If it becomes apparent that no more animals can be housed, the farm should be deregistered through the coordinator. In this case, a final audit must be conducted before the farm becomes vacant. If a final audit is not conducted at the end, the farm will face a contractual penalty.

What happens if the implementation deadline cannot be met?

If a livestock owner is unable to meet the transition deadline they have chosen, it can be postponed via the coordinator. However, this cannot be done retroactively (i.e., after the chosen transition deadline), even if the audit has not yet taken place.

How long must the animals be kept on an ITW-certified farm, at a minimum?

All cattle (including purchased cattle) must be kept continuously on an ITW-eligible farm for at least the last six months prior to slaughter. As of January 1, 2027, all cattle (including purchased cattle) must be kept continuously on an ITW-eligible farm for at least the last eight months prior to slaughter. If, in individual cases, marketing is necessary before the expiration of the six-month period (or, as of January 1, 2027, the eight-month period), these cattle may not be marketed as ITW animals.

The plan is to close the ITW chain in the future so that all cattle must be kept continuously under ITW conditions. The chain closure is to take place in parallel with the QS system. The ITW will provide timely information on this in due course.

What must be considered regarding the diagnostic data monitoring criterion?

For all ITW slaughter animals, the officially recorded slaughter findings are entered into the central QS database by the slaughterhouses. Cattle farmers therefore automatically participate in this monitoring and do not need to take any action. More detailed information can be requested from the respective regional coordinator or found in *the QS Guide to Findings Data in Cattle Slaughter*.

The monitoring system is continuously being developed. In the future, there will be cross-farm analyses and farm comparisons that will be shared with livestock owners so they can ensure animal health to the best of their ability.

What needs to be considered regarding the antibiotic monitoring criterion?

Antibiotic data is recorded for all ITW cattle. This is done through the QS Antibiotic Monitoring program. Livestock owners must observe two points:

First, they must report the average number of animal places to the coordinator and specify which veterinary practice they work with.

Second, they must agree with the veterinary practice that the veterinarian's antibiotic prescriptions will be entered into the central QS database. After that, monitoring continues automatically for cattle farmers; they only need to take action if there are changes to the information mentioned above. More detailed information can be requested from the respective regional coordinator or found in *the QS Guide to Antibiotic Monitoring for Cattle*.

The monitoring system is continuously being developed. In the future, there will be cross-farm analyses and farm comparisons that will be shared with livestock farmers so they can ensure animal health to the best of their ability.

Initiative Tierwohl GmbH

Managing Directors: Dr. Alexander Hinrichs, Robert Römer
Schwertberger Str. 14
53177 Bonn
Tel +49 228 336485-0
Fax +49 228 336485-55
info@initiative-tierwohl.de