The Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese Consortium responds to allegations made by CIWF

Reggio Emilia, 28 November 2017 – In light of the charges made against us by CIWF, the Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese Consortium wishes to make the following statements to clarify the matter and reject the allegations of negligence regarding animal welfare.

It is not true to say that animals in the Parmigiano Reggiano supply chain are maltreated.

CIWF has accused us of mistreating the cows whose milk is used in our product. **This is an unsustainable allegation in every sense.** The farms within the Parmigiano Reggiano supply chain are, in fact, monitored by veterinarians as provided for by current European regulations. There is no “animal mistreatment” in as far as the standards laid down by the laws are widely respected. Our supply chain is subject to checks and adheres strictly to the regulations on animal welfare.

**The scenario described in the CIWF report does not represent the reality in our industry.**

The scenario described in the CIWF report relates to a non-significant sample and in no way represents the Parmigiano Reggiano supply chain. Indeed, the report is based on only 9 barns, whilst the farms that produce the milk for the two PDO products subject to these allegations number over 8,000 (3,000 for Parmigiano Reggiano). Therefore, the examples given correspond to 1 in 1000 of the farms supplying both industries. The Consortium acknowledges the existence of these isolated cases and hopes that their adherence to the standards established by European regulations will be verified by the competent authorities. These are poor examples that the Consortium condemns and in no way represent the animal welfare standards underpinning our PDO products.

**The Parmigiano Reggiano supply chain does not operate according to industrial standards: our farms cannot be defined as “intensive”.**

The Parmigiano Reggiano supply chain is made up of 3,000 farms: these are mostly family-run operations and **can in no way be described as intensive.** One need only consider that there are on average 85 animals per farm, with each animal producing around 6.5/7 metric tonnes of milk per year: these levels fall far below those in the main European dairy producing zones. Moreover, 30% of the farms are located in mountainous regions, where all forms of intensive farming are impossible. The existence of these farms also has a social value: our cheese industry keeps these mountain communities alive and creates economic spin-off in disadvantaged areas.
The Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese Consortium not only respects the regulations on animal welfare, but goes further by establishing a strict diet for the animals to keep them in optimal health.

The wellbeing of our cows is an essential factor in producing our PDO product. To make good cheese, you must begin with an excellent raw material. Therefore, it is important for the entire supply chain that the cows are in the best possible health, so that they can produce the quality milk we need to maintain the high standards required for producing Parmigiano Reggiano. Not only do the farms respect European animal welfare legislation, but our own specifications go even further, imposing a specific diet to ensure our cows receive the right nutrition for perfect health. Indeed, our specifications set out the prevalent use of local forage. At least 50% of the forage used must be produced by the farm that produces the milk, and at least 75% must come from the local area. The animals’ diet must also include plant-based feeds made using cereals such as barley, wheat and corn. Poor-quality raw materials such as by-products of the food industry and fish and meat meal are absolutely forbidden. Fermented forage, such as corn silage, is also forbidden. These extremely strict regulations are essential and have helped make Parmigiano Reggiano one of the world’s best-known and best-loved Italian products.

The roles and objectives of the Consortium.

The specifications which apply to Parmigiano Reggiano production do not deal with animal welfare because this topic does not fall within the scope of our production specifications, and is governed by specific European regulations. There are laws and controls which ensure maximum respect for the animals: these are the rules which ensure that no form of mistreatment can take place. The Parmigiano Reggiano production specifications, approved by European Regulation, have the purpose of explaining the link with the land of origin, and protecting the specific quality of the finished product. In particular, the Consortium has the task of defending and protecting the designation of origin, and of promoting Parmigiano Reggiano as a product, to encourage its consumption. Nevertheless, the Consortium is particularly sensitive to the topic of the quality of life of cattle and is undertaking a certification and transparency project on animal welfare to implement a certification system. The model adopted is that of the Italian Animal Welfare Reference Centre (CReNBA), which has its headquarters at the Brescia office of the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale della Lombardia ed Emilia Romagna (Lombardy and Emilia Romagna Experimental Zootechnic Institute). The first step will be to map out animal welfare along the supply chain, with the help of accredited veterinarians, before proceeding with implementing a proper system for certifying animal welfare. Animal welfare is already a priority in our sector: consumer concern in this regard has encouraged us to invest in setting up proper certification by a third party recognised in Italy as an authority on the matter.

Our cows have a good life.

There is no definite link between grazing and wellbeing. The cattle barns in our supply chain provide cows with shelter, adequate space to move and to rest, good ventilation, water to drink, a suitable diet, and are installed with shower systems. There is no direct correlation between grazing and a “happy life” for the animals. Whilst grazing may be the best solution for some latitudes and geographical regions of Europe (and dozens of our farms do indeed adopt this practice), the hot summers typical of our country could inflict serious stress and discomfort on animals left out in the heat. The cows in our supply chain live in cattle barns, and are provided with space and comfort
suited to their needs, very often with large enclosed areas of pasture to allow the animals ample freedom of movement. Standards for the facilities and technical characteristics of the accommodation are established by European regulations and subject to checks by the veterinary service. If isolated cases of non-conformation to the regulations do exist, it is in the interest of the Consortium that such exceptions are brought to light and that the necessary steps are taken, without generalising and attributing the problem to the industry as a whole, which has always been attentive to animal welfare and is one of the Made in Italy brand’s finest assets.

**Parmigiano Reggiano has always had a transparent supply chain**

The **Parmigiano Reggiano supply chain** has always been completely transparent. One of the Consortium’s most important initiatives is the organisation of visits to farms and dairies, the goal being to show consumers how the “King of Cheeses” is made. In 2017 alone, over 100 thousand visitors were able to experience the artisan skill and excellent quality of Parmigiano Reggiano production hands on. We have nothing to hide and we are proud of our product and our tradition.

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