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**Prime Minister Sven Schulze speaks at the HEIDEMARK Conference in Berlin**

**CEO Ruff: "We are ready to do our part"**

*Berlin, 25 February 2026* – "Brussels is the big challenge! Our food must come from Europe, from Germany, from the regions," said Minister President Sven Schulze yesterday evening at the HEIDEMARK Conference in Berlin on the topic of "Good animal husbandry secures our supply". The head of the Saxony-Anhalt state government appealed to the expert audience of 150 guests from politics, business, agriculture and science in the F.A.Z. Atrium to better educate people about good animal husbandry in Germany. But he also said to politicians: "We need reliable framework conditions that give farmers security for their investments. I know we have some catching up to do in this area. I will take this issue to the next conference of minister presidents."

Sven Schulze presented a special initiative that he has introduced in Saxony-Anhalt. Under this initiative, every student who decides to do an internship on a farm receives a fee of 120 euros per week from the state. The aim is to raise awareness of agriculture among the general public.

Earlier, host Andres Ruff had called on politicians in his welcoming speech to quickly agree on a clear concept for animal husbandry. "We are ready to do our part," said the CEO of the poultry meat specialist for the industry. "We are in favour of more animal welfare rules that actually benefit the animals and maintain our competitiveness." Ruff continued: "However, we do not accept that we should jeopardise our self-sufficiency by buying our food abroad, where it is produced cheaply and far below our quality criteria."

The CEO of HEIDEMARK called on politicians to amend emissions and building regulations to allow the conversion and construction of new animal husbandry facilities. Farmers who want to convert their empty pigsties to poultry, for example, should be able to obtain permits to invest and not be effectively banned from their profession by bureaucratic procedures.

"Poultry production is not a niche market. It is a central component of the German food industry. Turkey and chicken meat are among the most important foods for all sections of the population in terms of price and nutritional value. Especially in times of economic uncertainty, it is clear how important stable, domestic production is," said Ruff.

Addressing policy makers from local authorities, state parliaments and the Bundestag, Ruff demanded: "We must be very clear on this point: if poultry farmers in Germany give up, production will not disappear. It will migrate to other EU countries or third countries with significantly lower standards." This helps neither animal welfare nor the climate – and certainly not regional value

creation. That is why I say quite clearly: "We need animal husbandry in Germany and we must also make it economically viable."

On this point, he found broad support in the subsequent discussions in three panels. SPD Member of Parliament Dr Franziska Kersten said: "With the new Animal Husbandry Labelling Act, we want to enable animal welfare and facilitate the construction of livestock housing. Her CDU colleague Anna Aeikens criticised: "It is unacceptable that farmers have to wait years for permits." Turkey farmer Philipp Mack from Baden-Württemberg explained a practical example from the application for a barn construction with climate-controlled outdoor access for husbandry level 3: "You need a separate expert opinion for each step. That costs money and delays implementation for years." He said he didn't care whether he recouped his investment in 5, 10 or 20 years. The important thing is "that a line is drawn under it and everyone knows what applies."

Prof. Dr. Harald Grethe, director of the Agora Agrar think tank and member of the legendary Borchert Commission, clearly put the ball in the politicians' court: "Animal welfare must be financed by the state." This statement did not earn him any applause from Dr. Lina Sofie von Fricken. The ESG manager at Stallbauer Big Dutchman said, "Farmers already feel confident about financing animal welfare themselves." She did, however, urge politicians to act quickly so that agriculture does not become the next German economic crisis, like the automotive industry. "We cannot rest on our laurels." Dr Barbara Grabkowsky from the University of Vechta brought an interesting aspect to the discussion: "We need to bring meat closer to people again. We have recently focused too much on quality and safety and completely neglected the importance of how and where food is produced and under what conditions."

Silvia Breher, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, spoke plainly: "We need an umbrella under which everyone can produce. We want to provide political security." Borchert had everything ready, but was unable to implement it for financial reasons. Now the aim is to first "get pigs up and running and then add all other animal species". HEIDEMARK Managing Director Bernd Wiegmann then called for "swift action." And ITW Managing Director Dr Alexander Hinrichs, a pioneer in animal welfare production, assured that the next stages 3 and 4 would be introduced as early as the next quarter. The State Secretary then had nothing left to do but praise: "We have an incredibly good agricultural sector."

Farmers have no choice but to invest in animal welfare if politicians remove the obstacles posed by mutually conflicting agricultural and building laws. The retail sector has left no doubt as to what goods it wants to and will offer its customers in the future. This is represented by Dr Julia Adou, who consistently stocks goods from higher animal welfare standards on the shelves at ALDI Süd. "ITW was not enough," she criticises, but adds that "it takes ten years to explain a system change to people". Her colleague Dr Leif Balz from the Schwarz Group's representative office in the capital reports that 50 per cent of the meat products in his Kaufland stores now come from animal welfare farms. However, he vehemently criticises the new animal welfare labelling law, which omits significant parts of the market: "The catering industry is like the Wild West. Nothing is labelled, there are no binding requirements." Dr Adou struck a conciliatory note at the end. She declared that her discount supermarket chain was committed to sourcing 90 per cent of its goods from Germany. Even if this is difficult to achieve at higher prices for customers due to the high animal welfare requirements.

## **About HEIDEMARK**

The HEIDEMARK Group, Ahlhorn, a third-generation family business, has evolved over the past two years from a leading turkey meat producer and marketer to a diversified poultry specialist through strategic decisions and acquisitions. The group employs 2,300 people at five locations and currently has a turnover of around 760 million euros.

Last week, the British Boparan Private Office announced the acquisition of all shares in Heidemark. Following approval by the European Commission, Heidemark will be integrated into the Europe-wide food group and, under the umbrella of the Dutch STORTEBOOM FOOD GROUP, will manage and be responsible for the German poultry business, primarily in the turkey and chicken sectors.

A selection of event images is available for download at the link below:

<https://www.heidemark.de/aktuelles/>

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