

Legal Guide Against Greenwashing & False Animal-Welfare Claims

Status: September 2026

Focus: Meat, dairy, eggs and animal-derived products

Since 27 September 2026, EU Directive 2024/825 (EmpCo) has been fully applicable and incorporated into national legislation under the **Act Against Unfair Competition (UWG)**. For animal-rights advocates and vegan activists, this legal framework provides powerful tools for challenging misleading advertising claims concerning animal products in a legally sound manner. Animal-welfare characteristics now explicitly fall under the strict requirements applicable to sustainability claims.

1. Ban on Fake Animal-Welfare Seals & Self-Created Labels

Companies often use self-created logos, such as “*Happy Cow from the Region*” or “*Controlled Animal-Welfare Farm*”, to create the impression of ethical production.

The legal position: The Annex to § 3(3) UWG (the so-called “**Black List**”) has been expanded by a new provision. Displaying a sustainability label without an independent certification scheme is prohibited per se.

Exact legal wording for quotation:

“UWG Annex (to § 3(3)) – Unfair commercial practices:
Displaying a sustainability label that is not based on a certification scheme or has not been established by public authorities.”

Leverage for activism: If a meat or dairy product carries a label created by the manufacturer itself, this constitutes an automatic violation. There is no need for extensive evidence regarding the actual conditions in which the animals are kept.

2. Ban on Vague Environmental and Animal-Welfare Claims

Terms such as “*climate-friendly milk*,” “*environmentally friendly chicken*,” or “*sustainable meat*” are increasingly common on supermarket shelves.

The legal position: General environmental claims are prohibited if the trader cannot demonstrate the recognised excellent environmental performance to which the claim refers, for example through the official **EU Ecolabel**.

Exact legal wording for quotation:

“UWG Annex (to § 3(3)):
Making a general environmental claim where the trader cannot demonstrate recognised excellent environmental performance to which the claim relates.”

3. Absolute Ban on Compensated “Climate Neutrality” Claims

Meat companies and dairy producers often label products as “CO₂-neutral” or “climate-neutral” by purchasing offset certificates, for example from forest-protection projects, while the methane and CO₂ emissions associated with livestock farming remain unchanged.

The legal position: This is one of the strictest new provisions introduced by the EmpCo framework. Advertising claims based on greenhouse-gas offsetting are absolutely prohibited.

Exact legal wording for quotation:

“UWG Annex (to § 3(3)): Claiming that a product has a neutral, reduced or positive impact on the environment in terms of greenhouse-gas emissions, where that impact is based on the compensation of greenhouse-gas emissions.”

4. Advertising Legal Minimum Standards as a Special Benefit

Companies often advertise legally required minimum standards as though they were special achievements, for example “*Free from prohibited antibiotics*” or “*Animal-friendly in accordance with legal requirements.*”

The legal position: Presenting mandatory legal requirements as a special achievement of the manufacturer or as a particular consumer benefit is prohibited.

Exact legal wording for quotation:

“UWG § 5(1) and Annex No. 10: Advertising a statutory obligation as a unique selling point or as a particular benefit for the consumer is misleading.”

5. Practical Guide to Preserving Evidence

If you suspect a violation in a supermarket or online, proceed strategically:

1. Photographic documentation:

Photograph the entire packaging (front and back), especially the small print and footnotes, as well as the price tag in the store.

2. Online documentation:

Save online advertising using full screenshots and archive the URL, for example via archive.org.

3. Submit an informal report:

Use the following template when contacting consumer-protection organisations / the Association for Consumer Information (VKI):

Sample Report to Consumer-Protection Organisations / VKI

Subject: Report of a Greenwashing Violation under the UWG Annex concerning [Product Name / Manufacturer]

Dear Sir or Madam,

I hereby report an allegedly unfair commercial practice by the manufacturer [Name] concerning the product [Product Name], identified on [Date] at [Location / Online Link].

The product is advertised with the claim “[*e.g. Climate-Neutral Beef*].” The packaging indicates that this claim is substantially based on CO₂ offset certificates. This constitutes a clear violation of the relevant provision of the UWG “Black List” implementing EU Directive 2024/825, under which environmental claims based on emissions compensation are prohibited.

[Alternative for labels/seals:] The label “[*Name of Label*]” displayed on the product is, based on available evidence, not based on an independent, officially recognised certification scheme. This constitutes a violation of the corresponding prohibition in the UWG “Black List.”

I kindly request that you examine this matter and, where appropriate, take action against the manufacturer.

Yours sincerely,
[Your Name]

This information is provided for informational purposes only.

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