

The Welfare Challenges Facing The Pig Sector

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Sow stalls

- Pig sector now largely compliant with EU ban on sow stalls
- But some Member States have yet to achieve full compliance



Surgical castration

- European Declaration on alternatives to surgical castration of pigs aims to end surgical castration by 2018
- Progress has been slow



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Surgical castration: solutions

- **Immunocastration** – there is no good reason not to use this
- Widely used in Belgium so should be possible to gain consumer acceptance elsewhere
- **Rear entire pigs:** 7% of French male pigs are now uncastrated
- Boar taint & aggression in entire males can be reduced by selective breeding, modified feed composition, reduced stress, and maintaining clean floors & animals
- Where surgical castration is performed, **prolonged analgesia & anaesthesia** should be used
- But none of the methods currently available are reliably satisfactory in farm situations

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Treaty on Functioning of EU recognises animals as “Sentient Beings”

One aspect of pig sentiency is revealed by
Lylla Watson in *The Whole Hog*

“ I know of no other animals that are more consistently curious,
more willing to explore new experiences, more ready to meet the
world with open-mouthed enthusiasm. Pigs are incurable
optimists and get a big kick out of just being.”



Pigs Directive requires provision of enrichment materials

- “must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material **to enable *proper* investigation and manipulation activities**”



Most pigs in EU are given
no enrichment or ineffective
objects such as chains



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Italy

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Ireland

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Directive requires provision of “materials *such as* straw, hay, wood, sawdust, mushroom compost, peat”

- Legally, if use a material other than one of those specified, it must be as effective in enabling the required outcome: “proper investigation and manipulation activities”

An appropriate enrichment material can be defined as a material which stimulates exploratory behaviour **for an extended length of time**, preferably comparable to the level of occupation provided by straw”

Technical Report prepared for EFSA, 2011



Which materials provide effective enrichment? EFSA reviews of scientific research

- enrichment materials should be complex, changeable & destructible
- indestructible objects such as chains are not sufficient to provide for the manipulatory needs of pigs
- so they may only be used as a **supplement** to destructible & rooting materials **but not as a substitute for them**: this has been said by EFSA & Commission
- Plastic chewing sticks & balls are not effective enrichment materials



Straw: one of best enrichments materials



Farm in
Scotland



Farm in France
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Dispensers/Racks with straw can provide meaningful enrichment



© Niamh O'Connell



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Can be used in fully slatted pen if a metal tray or a wooden board is placed on the slats to catch straw that falls down

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Wood shavings/wood chips (*Canadian bedding system*)

Effective enrichment:
this Dutch farm
provides a thin layer
of about 5-10cm of
ground wood placed
on the floor



© Jorg Broenink, farmer, the Netherlands

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“An intact curly tail may well be the single most important animal-based welfare indicator. In addition, it stands for high-quality management and respect for the integrity of the pig.” Technical Report prepared for EFSA in 2011

Farmers who gets their pigs through to slaughter age without either tail biting or docking will have run a very good system



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Directive prohibits routine tail docking

- Before docking farmers must take "other measures" to prevent tail biting
- In particular "inadequate environmental conditions or management systems must be changed" before docking is carried out
- Scientific evidence helps us understand what is meant by "inadequate" conditions or systems



Cyprus

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EFSA: principal causes of tail biting include absence of straw & a barren environment

Provision of enrichment is not the only factor needed to prevent biting.

Enrichment is necessary but not on its own sufficient. Other elements that can trigger tail biting must also be addressed.

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Other measures shown to reduce risk of tail biting: EFSA Opinion & Taylor *et al*, 2010

- **Feed/drink**
 - ensure each pig has adequate feed intake & avoid competition for feed
 - Provide correct balance of nutrients
 - ensure diet is adequate in salt & essential amino acids
 - provide access to clean drinking water
- **Climatic environment**
 - avoid heat or cold stress & high airspeed
 - provide good ventilation
 - avoid aversive factors in atmosphere e.g. ammonia
- **Health**
 - ensure pigs are in good health
- **Avoid mixing**
- **Remove tail biters & victims from the group**



Many EU fattening pigs are kept without enrichment materials



Spain

- Farmers who keep pigs in such conditions have not changed “inadequate” conditions as required by Directive
- So cannot lawfully tail dock



A farmer who keeps pigs like this - & has also provided good feed, climate & health - but who still has a tail biting problem, can lawfully dock pigs as s/he has genuinely tried to prevent biting by giving the pigs good conditions



But cannot tail dock
Indefinitely – they must
continue trying to prevent
biting by improving
conditions

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Excellent *EUWeINet* training tool is at <https://euwelnetpigtraining.org/>

- Clear advice for inspectors & farmers on compliance with requirements of Directive on enrichment & tail docking
- Available in English, French, German, Polish, Italian, Spanish & Dutch



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Another insight into animal sentience is provided by St Basil of Caesaria (329-379 AD):

“May we realize that they live not for us alone, but for themselves and for Thee and that they love the sweetness of life even as we, and serve Thee better in their place than we in ours”



Many sows still spend over 20 weeks of the year in stalls & crates so narrow that they cannot turn round



For many 40% of their time is still spent like this



- Farmers should stop using sow stalls during the first four weeks of pregnancy
- Farrowing crates should be rapidly replaced by free farrowing systems

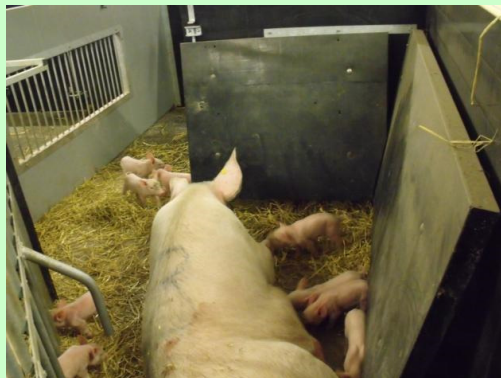
Several alternatives to farrowing crates are available



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Alternatives to farrowing crates



SAC indoor free farrowing system

Piglet mortalities in loose farrowing systems can be as low as or lower than in crates

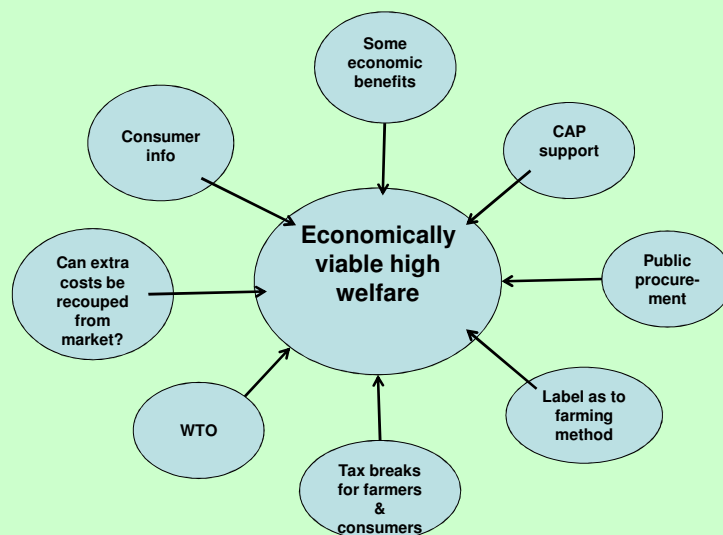


Danish SWAP system

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Excessive litter sizes

- Large litters \Rightarrow Low birth weight \Rightarrow High piglet mortality rates
- Low birth weights associated with a variety of negative long-term effects on piglets, e.g. increased reactivity to stress throughout the pig's lifetime
- Breeding of sows for ever increasing litter size should be brought to an end



Good welfare can in some cases be economically beneficial

- **Results for free sows in 360° farrowing pen** (Pig World, 2013):
- Free sows eat 10% more so producing more milk
- Piglets up to 25% heavier at weaning
- £8 [€11] benefit per piglet due to reaching slaughter weight earlier
- Sows have condition score 1.5 higher at weaning, probably benefiting next litter
- Mortality 0.5% lower than for old farrowing crate system



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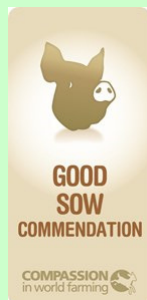
Good welfare can in some cases be economically beneficial

- Average benefit of raising uncastrated pigs is around €5 per pig due to better feed conversion: European Commission, 2013, Study and economic analysis of the costs and benefits of ending surgical castration of pigs
- Beyond a certain point increasing litter size can be economically disadvantageous due to the increased costs of sow care & the poorer quality of some piglets:
The Ethical and Welfare Implications of Large Litter Size in the Domestic Pig: Challenges and Solutions, 2011. The Danish Centre for Bioethics and Risk Assessment and The Scottish Agricultural College

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Good welfare can in some cases be a marketing advantage

- Growing interest in food quality with consumers viewing good animal welfare as an important component of food quality
- Farmers who rear pigs outdoors or to high indoor welfare standards under an assurance scheme may find that consumers are willing to pay a price premium which not only covers the extra costs but provides increased profits
- Compassion in World Farming *Good Pig Awards* celebrate farms & companies with high welfare standards



McDonalds UK:

awarded a Good Sow Commendation for not confining their sows in sow stalls or farrowing crates and providing them with manipulable material & bedding throughout their lives



Chipotle Mexican Grill, France:

uses meat from pigs raised outdoors or indoors on straw bedding



Consumers can drive animal welfare improvements – Don't keep them in the dark

- Consumers need to be better informed about today's livestock production methods & their implications for animal welfare
- End misleading labels that suggest animals farmed industrially have been kept in much better conditions – this undermines farmers who are genuinely producing to high standards & inhibits marketplace growth for higher welfare products
- Independent research with representative sample of citizens in 3 countries: Big majority in each country said that they would like to see the EU mandatory egg labelling system extended to 'all meat and dairy products' (Czech Republic: 78%; France: 92%; UK: 83%)



Mandatory labelling as to farming method would stimulate the market for higher welfare products



Outdoors



Intensive
indoors

© Colin Seddon



Extensive
indoors

Scheme to be underpinned by outcome-based assessments to ensure that systems associated with high welfare are indeed delivering good welfare



Role of Government in helping move to higher welfare: subsidies & taxes

- Substantial CAP funds should be used to help restructure the pig sector e.g. by supporting investments in free farrowing systems & contributing to the cost of providing enrichment materials for a transitional period
- Tax breaks could reduce the cost of high welfare farming
 - Farmers' tax liabilities could be reduced by providing generous capital allowances for investments in high welfare farming
 - Consumer costs could be lowered by placing the minimum VAT rate on high welfare food



Role of Government in helping move to higher welfare: public procurement & WTO

- Public procurement: food provided in e.g. schools & hospitals should be produced to good welfare standards as this will expand the market for high welfare meat
- WTO: EU should protect farmers from low welfare imports – recent WTO case law suggests EU can require imports to come from animals reared to standards equivalent to EU's provided that there is no element of discrimination

