

Action Plan

Better animal welfare for pigs

- Summary

June 2014

Animal welfare and economic growth go hand in hand

The pig production in Denmark is internationally recognized as being resource efficient, of a high quality and maintaining a high food safety standard. At the same time pig production is important for the Danish economy. This should remain unchanged.

Denmark produces millions of pigs. With a production of this size comes a huge responsibility. Thus, there is a need to do even more to address welfare problems for pigs. This should be done in a way that balances the need for significant improvements of the animal welfare with the interests of the industry with respect to economic growth and development.

On 13th of March 2014 I invited representatives from the Danish farming industry, slaughterhouses, animal welfare organizations, consumer organizations, veterinarians and retailers to a 'Pig Summit' focusing on better welfare for pigs.

We agreed to work for significant animal welfare improvements for pigs – and at the same time considering the high reputation of Danish Agriculture and Food Industry as well as future growth possibilities in the food sector.

The conditions in the pig barn should be improved through a joint effort. The main emphasis of this effort will happen in the agricultural industry – however the support from retailers and consumers is important. Moreover I as a minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries will put my effort into establishing conditions that will enable the Danish agricultural industry to continue being a competitive industry that provides income and jobs in Denmark.

There is an urgent need for the many agreed good intentions to be translated into concrete initiatives in order to achieve the objectives agreed upon by the participants in the Pig Summit:

1. Higher survival rates among piglets and sows
2. In the longer term all sows should be housed in loose housing systems
3. Ending castration of piglets
4. Reducing the number of tail docked piglets
5. Strengthened efforts against gastric ulcers
6. Animal welfare to be included in innovation of future pig stable systems.
7. More options and information for consumers
8. More education in animal welfare
9. Pig welfare improvements internationally

In this folder I present the action plan with the various initiatives including both the agreed common objectives and the industry's own objectives.

With the action plan, we have jointly agreed upon and established a focused plan to ensure a Danish pig production, where animal welfare and economic growth go hand in hand.

Dan Jørgensen
Minister for Food
June 2014

1. Higher survival rates among piglets and sows

The average mortality rate for piglets in Denmark is 22,4 % in conventional herds and about 33 % in organic herds. The mortality rate for piglets constitutes an economic loss for the farmer. At the same time a high mortality rate is both an animal welfare problem and an ethical problem.

Objective

The survival rate for piglets is to be increased by 1 piglet per litter by 2020. This corresponds to 6000 more surviving piglets per day. On an annual basis it is equivalent to 2,2 million more living piglets representing a value for the pig producers of more than 400 million DKK (54 million Euro). This may contribute to cover the costs necessary to achieve the goal.

The following initiatives will be launched in order to achieve the goal:

- *Targeted monitoring and action plans to reduce mortality*
The agricultural industry has acknowledged that in future, farmers with high piglet mortality rates must involve their veterinarian to ensure that fewer piglets die in their herds. This will be achieved through individual action plans monitored by the veterinarian.
- *DKK 10 million (1,3 million Euro) will be allocated to reduce mortality in organic pig farms*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries provides through The Green Development and Demonstration Program grants for two projects aiming at 1) higher survival of organic piglets and 2) breeding pigs that are better suited for the organic production method, where the sows are loose housed even when farrowing.
- *Breeding for better survival*
The agricultural industry has committed itself to maintain focus on breeding for better survival - in order to support efforts to reduce piglet mortality.

Objective

The survival rate for sows must be raised. Each time the mortality rate for sows is reduced by 1 percent the farmers will gain more than 50 million DKK (6,7 million Euro). This amount may contribute to cover the costs associated with achieving the target.

The following initiatives will therefore be launched:

- *Improved advice to farmers to ensure lower sow mortality rate.*
The reasons for the high mortality rate for sows must be identified. Farmers with high mortality rate among the sows in their herd must in future involve their veterinarian in order to ensure that fewer sows die.
- *Better breeding aiming at higher survival among sows.*
The agricultural industry is aiming the breeding goals for more durable and strong sows in order to reduce the mortality.

2. In the longer term all sows should be housed in loose housing systems

Confinement of sows is an animal welfare issue as it reduces the sow's ability to move and restricts their natural behavior.

It is a requirement that gestating sows are kept in group pens, where the sows stay approximately 11 weeks until farrowing. As of 1st of January 2015 there is in addition a Danish requirement of loose-housing in the service and gestation control unit, where the sows are kept approximately 5 weeks in connection with the insemination and until they are found pregnant. However the sows are still tethered in the farrowing section, where they give birth and stay until the piglets are weaned (about 4-5 weeks in total).

Objective

At least 10 % of the lactating sows should be housed in loose housing systems by 2020.

The following initiatives will therefore be launched:

- 100 million DKK (13,4 million Euro) will be allocated as investment aid for loose housing systems in the farrowing section.
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries will increase the overall amount available for investment aid for voluntary conversion to loose housing systems in the farrowing section. In 2014 50 million DKK (6,7 million euro) are allocated for conversion to loose housing in the farrowing section. On the basis of the applications in 2014 there will be allocated up to 50 million DKK (6,7 million Euro) investment aid for loose housing systems in 2015. All together an investment aid of 100 million DKK in 2014 and 2015 may result in approximately 16.600 new pen places. Approximately 6 % of lactating sows may subsequently be housed in loose housing systems. This corresponds to about 60.000 sows farrowing in loose housing systems per year, meaning that nearly 2 million piglets will be born into loose housing systems.

3. Ending castration of piglets

Surgical castration of male piglets is common practice in the Danish pig production. Around 4 % of entire male pigs develop boar taint, but currently all male piglets are castrated to prevent boar taint in the meat. Surgical castration, however, is painful for the pig and is problematic from an animal welfare point of view. At the same time castration requires more manual work for the farmer, and it is well-known that castrated pigs have a lower feed conversion. This means that ultimately it will be profitable for the pig industry to stop castration.

Objective

Castration without anesthesia must cease by 2018

The following initiatives will therefore be launched:

- *Increased production and sale of meat from entire (uncastrated) male pigs.*
Pig producers, slaughterhouses and retailers shall implement initiatives leading to production and sale – in Denmark and abroad – of meat from entire male pigs. It is expected that by 2015 meat from entire male pigs may be sold at the international market.
- *5,6 million DKK (0,75 million Euro) for the development of methods for detection of boar taint in pork*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries provides - through The Green Development and Demonstration Program - support for a project to develop a method for detection of boar taint in meat from entire male pigs.
- *Breeding of pigs with less boar taint*
The pig industry is working to breed pigs where boar taint occurs to a lesser extent.
- *2 million DKK (0,27 million Euro) for the development of feed additives that reduce boar taint.*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries provides - through The Green Development and Demonstration Program - support for a project, which aim at reducing boar taint in pork through the use of feed additives.

4. Reducing the number of tail docked piglets

More than 95 % of all piglets in Denmark are tail docked within the first four days of their life. This is done to reduce the risk of tail biting, which is a very painful condition for the pigs. The issue with tail docking is that the procedure in itself is also painful for the pigs. At the same time tail docking does not remove the underlying cause of tail biting such as stress or lack of enrichment material.

Objective

The proportion of tail docked pigs shall be decreased significantly.

The following initiatives will therefore be launched:

- *Targeted control of enrichment and rooting material in the pig stable.*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries will carry out targeted welfare campaigns to verify compliance with the rules on adequate supply of rooting and enrichment material for the pigs. Non-compliance with the rules will be sanctioned.
- *Large-scale research project on how to avoid tail docking*
There will be set up a large-scale experiment with no tail docking in integrated herds, i.e. herds with both piglets and finishers.
- 6,4 Million DKK for the development of new technology to provide more straw in pig barns.
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries provides - through The Green Development and Demonstration Program - support for a project that will make it easier to provide more straw for pigs and at the same time is able to handle slurry easily and efficiently.

5. Strengthened efforts against gastric ulcers

A study of the gastrointestinal health of finisher pigs and sows from 2013 showed that 30 % of finisher pigs and 51 % of sows for slaughter had gastric ulcers of varying degrees.

Severe cases of gastric ulcers in sows are assumed to be an issue for the welfare and thus the productivity of the sow. Severe cases of gastric ulcers in finisher pigs are a problem for productivity as they result in i.e. a lower daily gain in the pigs.

Objective

The prevalence of gastric ulcers should be reduced through strengthened health control

The following initiatives will therefore be launched:

- *Intensified disease control in slaughterhouses*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries intensifies disease control in slaughterhouses and screens for gastric ulcers in sows from all herds with statutory health advisory agreement.
- *Changing of feed.*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries is cooperating with the agricultural industry and the feed industry to develop animal feed stuffs that may cause fewer gastric ulcers
- *Research on gastric ulcers in finisher pigs.*
A new research project shall determine the causes and extent of gastric ulcers in finisher pigs. In addition a literature review on the possibilities to reduce the prevalence of gastric ulcers and on the importance of the origin of the pig - conventional, organic or free range production – will be prepared.

6. Animal welfare to be included in innovation of future pig stable systems (“Moon Pig Project”)

“The Moon Pig Project” aims at developing a sustainable pig stable for the future. So far “The Moon Pig Project” has focused on an environmental sustainable pig stable. In the future there will be increased focus on animal welfare in “The Moon Pig Project”.

“The Moon Pig Project” is a public-private partnership initiated by the innovation strategy of the government. “The Moon Pig Project” shall lead to the future regulation of the pig production based on output rather than input – so called emission-based regulation, which brings us closer to the vision to bring expanded pig production in accordance with environmental, climatic and animal welfare considerations.

The project is considered as ambitious as the American project in the sixties to send the first man to the Moon – hence the name “Moon Pig”.

Objective

“The Moon Pig Project” shall focus on housing systems that improve animal welfare.

The following initiatives will therefore be launched:

- *Development projects shall bring animal welfare into focus.*

A total of five projects have been launched. Two projects concern new methods to avoid castration of male pigs. One project is about ending tail docking, another is about new stable systems for pigs that are not docked, and the fifth project is about handling more straw for pigs in the stable.

Positive results from the projects may make it possible to incorporate a higher level of animal welfare in the concept stable and/or in future stables that are foreseen to be built with inspiration from the concept stable.

7. More options and information for consumers

Consumers should have more opportunities to choose products with better animal welfare. Consumers should be informed about the sort of product they choose in the supermarket.

Objective

Slaughterhouses and retailers commit to providing consumers with more information and more opportunities to choose products with better animal welfare.

The following initiative will therefore be launched:

- *Consumer information on animal welfare*

The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries has set up a working group with a range of stakeholders including slaughterhouses and retailers to examine consumer choices.

8. More education in animal welfare

Every year around 1400 students are enrolled at an agricultural college. Education plays an important role in raising the level of animal welfare in the stables.

Objective

Increase knowledge and understanding of animal welfare through education.

The following initiative will be launched:

- *Better education in animal welfare*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries will in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the agricultural industry develop and improve teaching and learning material with a focus on animal welfare. In addition the possibilities for a mandatory course in animal welfare for farm workers will be explored.

9. Better animal welfare at international level

Many of the countries to which Denmark exports pork have different standards for animal welfare. If the Danish efforts are to contribute to better welfare for the pigs, while at the same time ensuring a competitive pig production in Denmark, it is necessary to work for better animal welfare at an international level.

Objective

Animal welfare must be improved across the EU.

The following initiatives will be launched:

- *Increased focus on international cooperation in research*
The ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries will increase the focus on animal welfare in the international cooperation in research.
- *Increased efforts for animal welfare in the EU*
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries is within the EU working to improve animal welfare on areas such as shorter animal transports, tail docking and castration.
- *International animal welfare conference.*
In 2015 Denmark hosts and organizes an international conference on animal welfare