OIE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ON-FARM WELFARE OF PIGS
SUBMISSION BY THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

July 2010

Introduction

The International Coalition for Animal Welfare (ICFAW) welcomes the decision by the OIE to produce recommendations concerning the on-farm welfare of pigs.

ICFAW’s submission focuses on the health and welfare problems that are associated with industrial production. Globally 55% of pigs are produced industrially and this proportion is likely to increase as the FAO reports that industrial animal production systems have been growing rapidly.

Industrial pig production can be broadly defined as farming of an intensive nature, where the production system/management style treats the animals as commodities and does not proactively support or allow management of them according to their individual needs and where the management of the animals hinders the performance of normal behaviours to such an extent that welfare is compromised. It is characterised by the confinement of breeding sows for most of their adult lives in stalls/crates so narrow that they cannot turn round and the keeping of fattening pigs in crowded, barren pens with fully slatted floors. In addition, piglets are routinely tail docked, teeth clipped and, in the case of males, castrated. These painful mutilations are usually carried out without anaesthetic or pain relief. Scientific research has established that industrially produced pigs are subject to a range of serious health and welfare problems.

ICFAW prefers pigs to be reared in well-designed, well-managed outdoor systems. Good welfare can, however, be achieved in indoors systems that provide ample space, enrichment materials and bedding, that are well ventilated and well lit, that do not use stalls, crates or tethers and that avoid mutilations and chronic hunger in sows.

1 The member organisations of the International Coalition for Animal Welfare, representing more than 12 million individual supporters internationally, include: Compassion in World Farming, Eurogroup for Animals, the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Japanese Farm Animal Welfare Initiative, the National Council of SPCAs, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the World Society for the Protection of Animals.


http://dad.fao.org/cgi-bin/getblob.cgi?sid=230b173a68b7f2af6efeca2d4a86b12e,1
ICFAW welcomes the emphasis placed by the OIE on welfare outcomes but believes that the OIE recommendations should also address resource and management inputs as guidance as to how to produce desired outcomes will be helpful to producers. Good inputs, for example regarding housing, space allowance and environmental enrichment, are essential for creating acceptable welfare potential. In addition, good husbandry and management are required for that potential to be fulfilled. In short, the quality of resources and management cannot be ignored as, if these are poor, one cannot expect to achieve good welfare outcomes.

ICFAW hopes that the OIE guidelines will address the following matters.

**Sow stalls (also known as gestation crates)**

Sows are often kept throughout their 16.5 week pregnancy in sow stalls. These metal-barred stalls are so narrow that the sow cannot even turn round. In some cases sows are tethered by a chain to the ground or the stall. Sows are kept like this for one pregnancy after another. Scientific research shows that, as compared with sows kept in groups, sows kept in stalls have reduced bone and muscular strength, reduced cardiovascular fitness and a higher incidence of foot and leg pathologies. In addition stereotypic behavior (e.g. bar biting) is common in sows confined in stalls. This repetitive behavior is an indicator of poor welfare. Abnormal inactivity and unresponsiveness is widespread in confined sows.

The risk of aggression in group housed sows can be prevented by good management. The main causes of aggression are competition for food and mixing sows that are unfamiliar with each other. Unfamiliar sows should not be mixed. The Scientific Opinion of the European Food Safety Authority concluded that “Keeping sows in intact groups from weaning to the end of pregnancy reduces aggression to a minimum compared to keeping them in dynamic groups, where new animals are repeatedly introduced”.

A number of approaches have been developed to reduce competition and aggression at feeding in group-housed sows. These include: electronic sow feeders, individual feeding stalls; trickle feed systems where food is delivered slowly over long periods into individual feeders; and dump and scatter feeders where sows are occupied for long periods in rooting for food.

In light of their detrimental impact on sow health and welfare, the European Union has prohibited the use of sow stalls from 1 January 2013 and the use of tethers from the beginning of 2006. Sow stalls have also been prohibited in several U.S. States and in the Philippines. The Australian State of Tasmania has announced its intention to ban sow stalls from 2017.

**ICFAW recommendation on sow stalls:** ICFAW is opposed to the use of sow stalls. The OIE recommendations should not permit the use of sow stalls and tethers.

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Chronic hunger in sows

The high-energy grain-based feeds used for sows are quickly digested and result in long-term periods of hunger.⁷ The provision of fibrous food gives the sow a means of adding bulk to her diet, thereby helping to satisfy feelings of hunger that can otherwise be a factor leading to aggression.

ICFAW recommendation on hunger in sows: Bulky or high fibre food should be available at all times for sows. The best way to satisfy the need for access to fibrous food is to provide a deep bed of straw or similar material. Other ways of providing fibrous food include the provision of grass silage and the addition of vegetable pulp to the feed, making it more bulky and therefore more satisfying.

Farrowing crates

Some farmers believe that crates are necessary to prevent sows from crushing their piglets by lying on them. Recent research, however, shows that well-designed farrowing pens in which the sow has ample space can be just as effective as crates in preventing piglet mortality. Analysis of data from Swiss farms — where farrowing crates have been banned — has found that piglet mortalities in farms using loose farrowing systems are no higher than in farms that use crates.⁸ Factors that are important in preventing mortality in loose farrowing systems include the quality of enrichment/bedding/nesting material, the thermal environment, an appropriate area to which the piglets can escape and means of protecting the piglets from the sow e.g. sloped walls.

ICFAW recommendation on farrowing crates: ICFAW is opposed to the use of farrowing crates as these severely restrict sows’ freedom of movement and do not permit them to show normal nest-building behaviour nor to excrete in a separate area. Farmers should be encouraged not to use farrowing crates.

Environmental enrichment

Scientific research has established that exploratory and foraging behaviours such as manipulating and investigating materials and rooting are important for pigs.⁹ Indeed, in semi-natural conditions pigs are highly active, spending 75% of the day engaged in such activities.¹⁰ When suitable rooting and manipulation materials are not available, pigs are likely to direct their exploratory behaviour towards companions, e.g. tail- and ear-biting.¹¹

ICFAW recommendation on environmental enrichment: Indoor-housed pigs must at all times have access to straw or other suitable materials such as hay, wood chips, wood shavings, sawdust, peanut shells or rice hulls to allow and encourage proper expression of their investigation and manipulation behaviours.

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⁷ As 4
¹¹ As 9
Floor type and bedding

Pigs need to have access to a solid floored lying area as fully slatted floors can lead to foot and leg injuries and discomfort and also make it very difficult to provide effective enrichment materials.

**ICFAW recommendation on floor type:** Pigs must at all times have access to a solid (i.e. not perforated or slatted) lying area that is provided with a sufficient quantity of clean, dry bedding to avoid discomfort. The solid area can be combined with a slatted dunging area. Indoor pigs in hot conditions need access to a cool floor or evaporative cooling aided by higher air-flow rates or water on the skin (e.g. through showering or misting systems or opportunities to wallow) or more drinking water.

Space allowance

Overcrowding is a risk factor for disease expression, skin lesions, tail biting, foot injuries and aggression and should be avoided.12

**ICFAW recommendation on space allowance:** Pigs must have sufficient space to be able to exercise, lie down on their sides without being obstructed by another animal and move away from other pigs if they desire. There must also be sufficient space to differentiate between a lying area and a dunging area. Providing additional space at higher temperatures is important so that pigs can lose heat by reducing physical contact with pen mates.

Age at weaning

Weaning before 4 weeks adversely affects piglet gastrointestinal processes causing diarrhoea and weight gain retardation.13 Some farmers are considering later weaning (e.g. at around 4-5 weeks) to ensure piglet health without routine use of antibiotics, increase piglet growth rates and reduce the incidence of post-weaning multi-systemic wasting syndrome. Indeed some farmers prefer to wean at 40 or even 56 days to ensure healthier piglets.

**ICFAW recommendation on weaning age:** Weaning of piglets should not be carried out before they have a significant feed intake from creep feed and not before 4 weeks of age.

Genetic selection

The genetic selection of pigs for rapid growth and lean meat without enough consideration of other factors has led to some widespread and serious problems, in particular leg disorders, cardiovascular malfunction when high levels of activity are needed or stressful conditions are encountered, and inadequate maternal behaviour.14 In addition, selection for large litter sizes has led to an increased proportion of piglets with low birth weight and so to high mortality rates among the piglets.15

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13 As 6
15 As 4
ICFAW recommendation on genetic selection: Selection for production traits should be avoided where this is likely to lead to health and welfare problems. Selective breeding should focus on improving the welfare of pigs by selecting for, e.g. breeds which make good mothers and are less likely to crush their young, smaller litters of healthier, more robust piglets and resistance to stress and disease. Improvements to health and welfare that may follow from such selection would have benefits for productivity.

Tail docking

Tail docking is painful and in some cases can result in long-term pain. Tail biting is multi-factorial in causation but the major underlying motivation is the need to perform exploration and foraging behaviour. Scientific research has identified the principal causes of tail biting as being a barren environment, the absence of straw and the use of slatted floors.\(^{16}\) Research has established that the proper way to prevent tail biting is not to dock the pigs’ tails but to keep them in good conditions and in particular to provide them with appropriate enrichment materials such as straw. Docking does not prevent tail biting from occur, it can still occur in docked pigs.

ICFAW recommendation on tail docking: Tail docking should not be carried out. Instead tail biting should be prevented by the provision of enrichment materials that enable pigs to carry out their exploration and manipulation behaviours. In addition, the following measures can help reduce tail biting:

- ensuring that each pig has adequate feed intake and avoiding competition for feed
- ensuring diet is adequate in salt and essential amino acids
- avoiding heat or cold stress and high airspeed
- avoiding mixing
- removal of tail biters and victims from the group
- preventing disease; outbreaks of disease can increase the risk of tail biting so extra vigilance is required at such times
- consideration of the breed that is used as the genetics of the pigs on the unit can affect the risk of tail biting.

Teeth clipping

It is likely that tooth clipping induces severe pain in piglets.\(^ {17} \) Competition for access to the teats is increased in large litters.\(^ {18} \) Increased competition for teats and milk can lead to an increase in teat and face injuries. Risk of damage to teats and to each other’s faces is reduced if all the piglets get a plentiful supply of milk. Ensuring sufficient milk supplies to piglets can be achieved by a combination of breeding sows with smaller litters as well as breeding and managing sows so that they reliably produce sufficient milk for their piglets.

Research indicates that the provision of enrichment and adequate space has a beneficial effect on sow health and welfare leading to higher feed intake and increased milk production. Better milk production means less competition for teats and higher weaning weights. Research also shows that

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16 Scientific Opinion on the risks associated with tail biting in pigs and possible means to reduce the need for tail docking considering the different housing and husbandry systems. The EFSA Journal (2007) 611, 1-13.
17 As 4
18 As 4
overall, tooth clipping or grinding has very little effect on sow mammary injuries and litter performance.\(^\text{19}\)

**ICFAW recommendation on teeth clipping:** Tooth clipping should not be carried out. Tooth grinding should also be avoided.

**Castration**

Castration causes both acute and prolonged pain. Castration without anaesthetic should be brought to an end. Anaesthesia accompanied by prolonged analgesia clearly reduces the pain and so is preferable to castration without anaesthesia. However, the various forms of anaesthesia are not problem-free; hence anaesthesia should only be used on a temporary basis pending the complete ending of surgical castration. Immunocastration is clearly preferable to surgical castration but should also be seen only as an interim measure until castration is brought to an end.

Alternative approaches to preventing boar taint in uncastrated boars include slaughter at lower weights and dietary and management measures (e.g. preventing wallowing in excreta, avoiding mixing, providing fibre rich feedstuffs like chicory or lupins and providing a thick layer of complex natural enrichment material). Genetic selection of males for reduced levels of boar taint and/or slightly later sexual development could also facilitate the rearing of entire males. Boar taint is being detected at slaughter by human ‘sniffers’ and an ‘electronic nose’ is under development.

**ICFAW recommendation on castration:** Castration without anaesthetic should not be carried out. Castration with anaesthesia and prolonged analgesia as well as immunocastration are clearly preferable to castration without anaesthesia but should be seen as only interim measures until castration is brought to an end.

**Resource on good pig welfare**

A resource on the animal welfare aspects of good agricultural practice in pig production has been published by ICFAW member Compassion in World Farming. This consists of a book, a film, a PowerPoint presentation and lecturers’ notes which draw on good practice from across the world. It is a valuable tool for lecturers, educationalists, vets, farmers, students of agricultural and veterinary science and for all who make decisions which affect the welfare of farm animals. This resource can be downloaded and a free DVD-ROM ordered at http://www.ciwf.org.uk/resources/education/good_agricultural_practice/default.aspx

The RSPCA, also an ICFAW member, has produced Welfare Standards for Pigs which can be found at http://content.www.rspca.org.uk/cmsprd/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application%2Fpdf &blobkey=id&blobnocache=false&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1232989461719&ssbinary=true

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