

**CURRENT SITUATION ON WELFARE LEGISLATION AND
RESEARCH WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION****E. von Borell***I. Status of European Welfare Legislation*

New intensive housing systems with farm animals in confinement have come into use. In recent years, the welfare of farm animals has become a major public policy issue in Europe. Growing attention has been given to legislative initiatives aimed at protecting animals kept for farming purposes. Since the ratification of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes in 1976, the European Economic Community (EEC) adopted a European Council Directive on minimum standards for the protection of pigs in 1991 (Council Directive 91/630/EEC). All members of the European Community have to implement these recommendations either by legislation or administrative practice until 1994. The Council Directive contains the following minimum standards for the protection of pigs (selection of major requirements):

- Space requirements according to the weight of the pigs
- Feeding once/day; restricted by fed pigs in groups have to be fed at the same time, unless they are fed by an automatic feeding system
- Pigs \geq wks of age should have access to water at all times
- Straw or other suitable material must be available to satisfy their behavioural needs
- Weaning after 3 wks of age, unless the welfare of the sow or piglets would be adversely affected
- Visual contact between pigs must be allowed
- Tethering of sows is not allowed in new constructions; existing systems may be used until the end of the year 2005

Measures should be taken to prevent aggressive behaviour; animal at risk or particular aggressors shall be removed

- Artificial light must be available for at least 8 hrs per day; lighting should be installed to allow the pigs to be inspected at any time

The Commission shall submit a report to the Council on intensive rearing systems which comply with welfare requirements of pigs by 1 October 1997.

Rad je priopćen na 47th Annual Meeting of the European Association for Animal Production, 26-29. August, 1996, Lillehammer

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II. Legislation on the national level

All EEC countries and Cyprus; Finland; Iceland; Malta; Norway; Slovenia; Sweden and Switzerland ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes from 1976. In 1986, recommendations for the keeping of farmed pigs were adopted by a Standing Committee specifying the general principles of the Convention of farm animal protection for pigs. Based on these recommendations by the Standing Committee, as well as on the Directive 91/630/EEC, specific legally binding rules for the protection of pigs were implemented by several European countries (i.e., Austria, Denmark, Germany, Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom).

In addition to the implementation of the European Directive, some countries were more rigid in their standards on the national level. The following list contains a selection on stricter provisions for the protection of pigs implemented in Austria (A); Finland (SF); Germany (D); The Netherlands (NL); Sweden (S); Switzerland (CH) and the United Kingdom (UK):

- Confinement of sows in crates is not allowed during a period of 4 wks following weaning; if sows are confined in crates, they must have daily exercise (D)

 - sows in crates must have temporary exercise outside their pen areas (CH)

 - crates need to be at least 2 m long (NL)

- Breeding pigs should be kept outdoors; pigs should not be confined permanently; from one wk before parturition, sows are allowed to be kept in crates (S)

- Crate or pen size should allow the pig to turn around (minimum: square of pig length, not shorter than 75% of the pigs' length) (UK)

 - bedding material need to be provided for farrowing pens for the first 2 wks after farrowing (CH)

 - Double or multi-tiered cages for pigs are not allowed (A) (CH) (SF)

 - pigs should not be weaned before the age of 4 wks (S)

 - wired flooring material has to be coated (i.e., by plastic material) (D)

 - The number of fattening pigs per building/unit should not exceed 300 (S)

- New or renovated animal facilities including equipment need to be certified in terms of animal welfare and health standards (S) (CH)

- All pens, except for weaner pigs, must have at least the proportion of 40% solid flooring (NL)

III. Research on pig welfare and housing

Great research efforts have been undertaken to improve welfare and housing for pigs in several European countries (mainly in Northern Europe). According to the publication record and the number of researchers, reasonable funding sources for welfare orientated research seem to be available in Scandinavian countries, UK, Benelux, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and France. The EU provides limited support for welfare research on a supranational level (i.e., animal transportation), although there is a lot of effort to organize and support scientific meetings and workshops for researchers that are actively involved in welfare orientated research.

Most emphasis for research on a national or regional level is put on:

- Research on the welfare of sows in groups and in varying degree of confinement
- Welfare friendly housing systems that comply with the demand for increasing environmental regulation and sustainability (alternative/ecologically sound housing)

Although the majority of research is performed by universities and federal institutions, some countries have research facilities that are run or supported by producer organisations and industry (i.e., Research Institute for Pig Husbandry (NL); Federation of Danish Pig Producers and Slaughterhouses (DK)). Researchers at the FAT in Tänikon (CH) evaluate and certify housing systems and equipment on the basis of ecological criteria and health status of pigs under various housing conditions. Another practicable approach is to evaluate housing and welfare of pigs on farms by using the welfare index system (Tiergerechtheitsindex 200; Sundrum et al., 1994).

IV. Future perspectives on pig welfare and housing

Integrated research on housing systems that comply with the requirements of welfare/health (including the welfare of the stockperson), environment and economics is needed in the future. Working groups on the national and international level should work on concepts for new housing and management systems aimed at coming up with a commonly accepted code of practice that might become implemented into legislation. These efforts are currently pursued by a working group of the EU-Commission (Scientific Veterinary Committee) that summarizes the scientific knowledge on intensive pig rearing systems which comply with the welfare requirements of pigs from the pathological,

zootechnical, physiological and behavioural points of view and on the socio-economic implications of the different systems. Another working group dealing with future housing and management systems for pigs has been established within the EAAP.

Outside Europe, codes of practice for the care and handling of pigs were issued by several countries (i.e., Agriculture Canada, 1984) and efforts are even made to formulate standards on a global level.

Harmonizing the requirements between different countries and continents will eventually reduce disadvantages in competitiveness arising from stricter requirements. On the other hand, more rigid standards might open the market (niches) for those consumers that are very concerned about the welfare of pigs and in general opposed to intensive housing.

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Primljeno: 5. 9. 1996.