



Low motivation and unawareness in small farmers as an obstacle for implementation of the EU pig welfare rules

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ABSTRACT - Using semi-structured interviews, Croatian pig farmers and institutional stakeholders were asked about their intentions to improve pig welfare, future perspectives, opinions and communication efforts on the EU pig welfare directives. While full-time family farmers (FFF) and employees at farm enterprises (EFE) expressed interest in improving pig welfare on their farms as a prerequisite for increasing competitiveness in the future, part-time family farmers (PFF) were not interested in pig welfare because they did not want to increase productivity and feared for their existence. Communication between institutional stakeholders and FFF with more than ten sows is best established, whereas communication with EFE is more via private consultants and communication with PFF is lacking. As Croatia is today counting over 85% farms as production units with up to 10 sows covering 75% of whole pig production, these results represent considerably important indicators of necessity to approach this population of farmers.

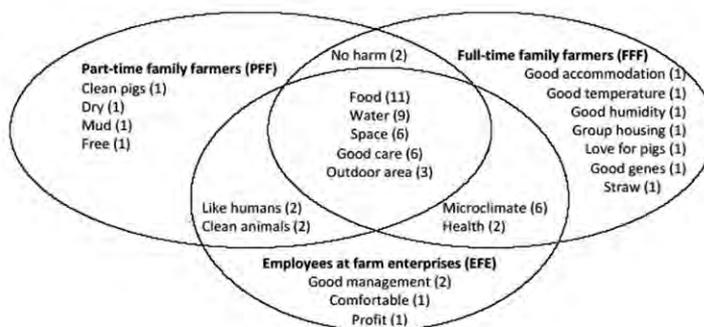
Key words: EU welfare directives, Pig production systems, Communication, Farmers.

Introduction - Croatia is an official candidate to become a new EU member state. In this course, Croatian pig production systems are being modernised in order to ensure product quality and competitiveness according to the European standards (Antunovic *et al.*, 2004). Yet, further efforts are required in particular as regards animal welfare, as well as strengthening of the administrative and inspection capacity (EC, 2008). According to Brambell (1965), the provision of pig welfare on farms is dependent on the well-being and motivation of a farmer. Also, Hemsworth (2003) argues the attitude and behaviour of stockpersons influences the welfare and productivity of farm animals. The present study aims to link future perspectives of Croatian farmers to their motivations to implement the EU pig welfare directives on farm, as well as their communication on EU welfare standards with stakeholders.

Material and methods - Seventeen farmers: PFF (part-time family farmers), i.e. those producing pigs primarily for own consumption (7); FFF (full-time family farmers), i.e. those engaging in commercial pig production (6); EFE (employees at large, commercial farm enterprises) (4) and six institutional stakeholders (ministries, the agricultural administrative body, veterinary service and agricultural extension service, universities and non-governmental organisations) were exposed to semistructured interviews about future perspective, perception of pig welfare and communication on the EU pig welfare directives. Interviews were recorded digitally. Data were analysed by using the SAS package (1990). Typed open-ended questions and close-ended responses, as well as quantitative information, were coded and analysed by Pearson's chi-square test as a statistical model adopted for data processing.

Results and conclusions – The motivation of farmers to ensure the welfare of their pigs was dependent on their future perspective as pig farmers. While most PFF stated no interest in improving pig welfare on farm, the remaining PFF were interested but frustrated about lacking governmental support. Amongst FFF, future perspectives varied considerably; from expecting improvement, to expecting a worse situation. Future perspectives of EFE differed between employees at company-owned production sites, who had a positive view, and contracted family farmers, who sometimes expressed uncertainty about their future. When asked to explain the term “pig welfare”, 18% of farmers were confused and could not think of any associations, while others used 24 different terms (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Associations with pig welfare stated by pig farmers (frequency in brackets).



Only 18% of farmers related their opinion about the EU welfare directives to the welfare of pigs, while all other farmers related it to production and human benefits. At the same time, the welfare of pigs was regarded by institutional stakeholders as better on small farms and posed no need to control (Table 1).

Communication was best established between stakeholders and FFF of ten or more breeding sows because they were considered to have good future perspectives, while FFF and

Table 1. Associations with pig welfare stated by institutional stakeholders.

Associations with pig welfare on small farms	Associations with pig welfare on large farms
Enough space, outdoor access	Old fashioned conditions, permanent stress
Good food, time	Bad food, pig is a number
Small number of animals	Large number of animals
Good human- animal interaction	Dirtiness
Tradition, no economic focus	Bad ventilation
Become friends, care, respect, more enrichment	No sunlight, light

PFF with less than ten sows were insufficiently approached. The presented findings support the assumption that welfare perceptions influence the realisation of the EU pig welfare directives (Bock and van Huik, 2007). In the light of the EU pig welfare equality demands by certain EU member countries (e.g. PigProgress.net, 2009), Croatian authorities will certainly have to find a way to approach motivation to improve pig welfare, especially in the population of small farmers who currently produce 75% of whole pig production.

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