



EURCAW-Pigs organized a first regional meeting, on 29-30 April, 2019. In total 9 delegates (CA's, policy workers) from member states LU, FR, DE, IE, BE and NL attended, and 1 delegate from DG SANTE.

### **Discussion topics**

The EURCAW regional meetings aim to meet with the primary target groups of the reference centre: policy makers and competent authorities. They are invited to bring topics to the table which they want to discuss to support their work on enforcing EU pig welfare legislation.

The delegates to this meeting brought in several topics, and after comparing it with EURCAW's work programme 2019-2020, three were chosen by the EURCAW team. The proposers were asked to introduce their topic in a short presentation at the beginning of the meeting. These presentations were followed by 3 'coffee table' discussions, one for each topic. The delegates and EURCAW members visited each of the three tables in subgroups, to discuss the topic and add their own questions and possible solutions. An invited expert on the topic area led each coffee table discussion. This expert was asked to fully understand the problem and solutions offered during the first day, to prepare for an 'reply' to be presented on the second day.

The topics were:

- Topic 1: Enrichment materials:

Enrichment material is a subject that keeps on leading to discussions with the pig sector. There is a demand for examples of materials that provide sufficient enrichment value for the pig but are also practical, durable, safe and hygienic. There is also a demand for examples for the use of straw above slatted floors.

*Expert: Lene Juul Pedersen, Professor in Animal Welfare and precision livestock farming, Aarhus University, Denmark;*

- Topic 2: Air quality in pig buildings:

Are there practical measurement methods and threshold values (e.g. ammonia, carbon dioxide, hydrogen sulfide) to indicate what is acceptable in pig buildings?

*Expert: Herman Vermeer, pig welfare scientist, Wageningen Livestock Research, The Netherlands;*

- Topic 3: Action plans:

The questions relate to the action plans that member states have to implement: Do the farmers conduct risk assessments? Are there thoughts about thresholds to allow tail docking? What sort of optimisation measures are expected and proportional?

*Expert: Hans Spoolder, senior scientist in applied ethology, Wageningen Livestock Research, The Netherlands.*

At the end of day 1, the invited topic experts started preparing their response. In the meantime a discussion was started on a common issue which most of the audience has come across: how do you promote a change in the way farmers, veterinarians and even colleagues think about complying with animal welfare legislation? A change from viewing it as a burden, towards an opportunity to improve the pig farming business. Inger



Anneberg (senior advisor and anthropologist at Aarhus University, Denmark) and Anita Hoofs (pig welfare scientist at Wageningen Livestock Research, The Netherlands) shared their experiences and ideas from a scientific and practical point of view.

Inger Anneberg talked about motivational interviewing as a method for eliciting behaviour change by helping farmers to explore and resolve ambivalence. Inspectors can e.g. apply this by having an active interest in understanding the farmer's background, by listening in an emphatic way, and not to start an argument or confront, etc.

Anita Hoofs put forward that a risk assessment should be a win-win situation to the farmer. Biting behaviour is a sign of an underlying problem. Reducing biting behaviour improves animal welfare but often also health and production. When talking with a farmer, the WHY should be put central: By 'knowing' you come to the next step: 'doing'. Questions should be asked in the farmer's language. When filling in a risk assessment and come to improvements, there should be interaction and cooperation between pig farmer, veterinarian and feed adviser. Support from the latter two groups is crucial. For this purpose and for a good process, you need a good assessment list of animal and non-animal based indicators.

### Wrap-up three topics

On day 2 the invited experts replied to the 3 topics introduced on the first day. They presented scientific knowledge, practical examples and their own thoughts on the topics. The following points were made or discussed during these feed-back sessions.

#### Topic 1: Enrichment materials:

- There is a need for a scoring system that incorporates both the value of enrichment materials for pigs weighed against practicability, availability, cost of providing, biosecurity and safety issues (for staff, meat, pig and environment). The Commission staff working document<sup>1</sup> on tail biting and enrichment materials divide materials into three categories (optimal, suboptimal and marginal). Examples of common enrichment materials are presented in a Table in that staff working document. *Outcome/action: EURCAW will elaborate this table by adding columns of the other aspects as a rough guideline. This will be posted on the webpage dossier on tail docking and tail biting under enrichment materials.*
- Examples on how to use the animal-based indicators for enrichment suggested by the staff working document were presented and discussed. The method and threshold levels of these examples were suggested by the [EUWelNet](#) project, supplied with results from a similar scoring system for straw reported by the [FareWellDock](#) project. *Outcome/action: The suggested threshold levels for compliance with the Directive will be posted on the EURCAW webpage under the dossier tail docking and tail biting in due time.*
- Inspectors and vet's need strong arguments backed up by scientific knowledge to encourage farmers to provide pigs with optimal materials rather than sub-optimal and marginal materials. In addition to

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<sup>1</sup> Commission staff working document on best practices with a view to the prevention of routine tail-docking and the provision of enrichment materials to pigs (2016). <http://edepot.wur.nl/475711>

animal welfare arguments, examples should therefore be available on links between allocation of optimal materials (like straw) and increased health & productivity.

*Outcome/action: EURCAW will make scientific evidence available of relationships between provision of optimal enrichment and health/productivity indicators. Also, an earlier Dutch report on economic benefits of reducing tail biting on farms<sup>2</sup> will be reviewed by EURCAW-Pigs and results summarised on the website.*

- There is a need for examples of real farmers with slatted floor pens that use straw or similar optimal materials. Examples of farmers' using straw in pens with slatted floor were given and the participants added further examples. In addition, there is a need for disseminating farmer's knowledge on managing vacuum type slurry system with straw. Such systems CAN handle some straw (10-50 g per pig daily), the amount depending on pipe size, flushing frequency and the use of water to flush. Farmer's need to experiment with their own slurry system to find the best possible management for handling optimal materials on their farm.

*Outcome/action: EURCAW will present examples of practical straw provision methods and experience with slurry systems that can handle straw in pens with slatted floors.*

- The MS asked for knowledge on how to close the open standards for provision of enrichment materials to comply with the Directive- concerning both amount and exchange frequency. Examples from a MS where CA have written down detailed instructions for compliance criteria of open standards for enrichment materials were presented during the summing-up presentation. The Directive include the wording ..."permanent access". Results from a study were presented regarding amount of straw needed to ensure "permanent access". The results showed that 30-40 kg pigs need 50-100 g straw and pig daily, while 80 kg pigs need 200- 250 g per pig daily to ensure permanent access. Such amounts are difficult to handle in a vacuum slurry system, while a mechanical scraper system can handle it. The instruction by the MS is to combine minor straw allocation with access to suboptimal materials positioned permanently in the pens. Farmers often use wooden beams (preferably non-splintering) for that purpose. The instruction by the CA's are to use one wooden beam per 10 pigs. A scientific study showed that pigs would increase exploratory behaviour if given 2 instead of 1 per 20 pigs. However, the increase in exploratory behaviour was minor compared to pigs supplied with 10 g straw per pig daily. The studies and instruction illustrate how combinations of different materials can optimize the benefit for the pigs.

*Outcome/action: EURCAW will give examples of MS's instructions for closing open standards under the dossier tail docking and tail biting, where possible underpinned by scientific studies.*

- Biosecurity was mentioned by the participants, since farmers' are worried about a possible risk of spreading e.g. African swine fever or foot and mouth disease through provision of e.g. straw. The likelihood that straw provision pose an essential risk factor for infectious diseases were discussed, but no conclusions were drawn. A MS recommend to store straw and similar materials for 3 month to reduce the risk of infectious diseases to spread. EFSA is currently uncovering risk factors for ASF. *Outcome/action: EURCAW will ask assistance from the EU reference lab on ASF and post answers under Q2E on the website (Questions to EURCAW).*

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<sup>2</sup> Financial consequences of tail biting in pigs. Report in Dutch: Financiële consequenties van staartbijten bij varkens. Wageningen Livestock Research (2011) <https://edepot.wur.nl/188443>

- Food safety risk as well as risks for pollution with small plastic pieces spreading through manure to the environment were raised and discussed. During the summing-up discussion, it was emphasised that plastic is a marginal material with low or no sustained interest for pigs. The suggestion is NOT to provide any breakable plastic materials to pigs. They do NOT benefit the pigs – therefore there is no need to risk pollution.

Topic 2: Air quality in pig buildings:

- As input for advice on practical measurement methods and threshold values, results of a Dutch study were presented on developing indicators (features) to assess climate in pig houses<sup>3</sup>. Aim was to create the possibility to enforce open standards on pig farms. In total, 64 farms with rearing piglets and 32 farms with finishing pigs were assessed by the Dutch inspection service. A set of climate related features was collected according to a newly developed protocol. The observations were animal and resource based. For each of these features, a reference value was chosen and exceeding this limit indicated a welfare reduction. A large proportion of these features was based on the Welfare Quality® assessment protocol for pigs<sup>4</sup>. A simple assessment of the reliability, variation and correlation between features reduced the dataset to 12 features.
- With Principal Components Analysis five of the features within this set appeared to be the major features and could be regarded as warning signals:
  - NH3 and CO2 relate to some animal features and are very useful as signal indicators. In The Netherlands there are no legal threshold values for CO2 and NH3. In the German pig welfare regulation (law) the upper limit for NH3 is 20 ppm. For poultry (broilers), values up to a max of 3000 ppm CO2 and 20 ppm NH3 are legally permitted<sup>5</sup> in the EU.
  - For piglets as well as growing-finishing pigs tail- and eye scores are suitable signal indicators;
  - For piglets also ear score, for growing-finishing pigs pig fouling are such suitable indicators.The conclusions were based on instantaneous observations, so there was no relation made e.g. with follow-up inspections or annual data like slaughter data, antibiotics and mortality.
- Animal based observations require more training, preferably internationally and use of a simple standardized protocol. Awareness should also be raised among farmers, and change can be stimulated by emphasizing that farmers lose money with bad air quality and accordingly with poorer health and welfare.

Outcomes/actions:

- *For assessing climate/air quality in relation to animal welfare and health, in The Netherlands a protocol and checklist is developed. EURCAW will publish the protocol and checklist. This will also be put under Q2E on the website.*

Topic 3: Action plans:

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<sup>3</sup> Alarms for enforcement of “Open Standards” for Animal Welfare – Climate in Pig Houses. Report in Dutch: Signaalindicatoren bij handhaving “Open Normen” voor dierenwelzijn; Pilot klimaat in varkensstallen. Wageningen Livestock Research (2017). <https://edepot.wur.nl/409283>

<sup>4</sup> Welfare Quality® assessment protocol for pigs (sows and piglets, growing and finishing pigs). Welfare Quality® (2009). <https://edepot.wur.nl/233470>

<sup>5</sup> Council Directive 2007/43/EC of 28 June 2007 laying down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1560253729368&uri=CELEX:32007L0043>

With regard to the action plans which member states have to implement, four issues were discussed: the performance of risk assessment, what threshold to allow docking should be applied (if any), optimisation measures to be expected, and how do CA's do their challenging work.

- Risk assessment: Member States should ensure that farmers carry out a risk assessment of the incidence of tail-biting based on animal and non-animal based indicators. This was recommended in the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2016/336, and agreed on by member states and the pig sector. Countries are developing their own assessment systems, e.g. a 'SchwIP light'<sup>6</sup>, based on 6 areas of the Commission Recommendation and a system designed with farmers and vets. Three countries (Germany, Denmark, The Netherlands) signed a declaration to unite their approach, aiming to have done a first assessment round by the end of 2019. *They are inviting others to join.* One country is investigating the possibility of having a risk assessment service by advisors, paid for by the government. Questions of frequency and costs need to be resolved. Another Member State suggests that industry drivers (such as competitive advantages) can be used to complement legal requirements by including *risk assessment in a quality assurance programme.*
- Thresholds to allow tail docking: Tail docking is not allowed as a routine, but can only be used under specified exceptional circumstances. The aim of the industry should be to provide the circumstances to keep pig tails on, not to prove that they need to dock because they have passed a threshold. Still, it is valid to ask the question what level constitutes sufficient evidence that "injuries to sows's teats or to other pigs' ears or tails have occurred"? (Chapter I, Annex I van Council Directive 2008/120/EC). One country suggested to look at thresholds in relation to efforts made to reduce biting. This requires farmers to record biting: Measuring = Knowing = Increased awareness. More biting means more pressure on a remedial action plan? The Thematic sub-group on pigs of the EU platform on Animal welfare is working on a protocol to determine when docking can (temporarily) be applied. It was also discussed that 'piglet importing countries' have the challenge of making farmers only buy pigs with long tails. However, the exporter claims nobody wants long tails and long tails are not offered. *An international agreement would help.*
- Optimisation measures: The directive is clear: "Before carrying out docking, other measures shall be taken to prevent tail-biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities". Their success can be measured in terms of improved environment, or management, decreased percentage tail biting/other parameters. The ultimate indicator is a curly tail, of course. Optimization of the six factors in the Commission Recommendation seems logical, however, it seems that most of the countries currently do not ask for meaningful optimization measures. An example is increased space allowance on your farm: it was claimed that this is not a legal requirement and would not hold in court, when challenged. But there are solutions. One suggestion was to *start small*: what can you do to keep the tails on in a few pens only? And in the case of *planning and building new farms*, can we create more awareness among farm builders to consider legislative requirements? What can we do at the planning stage of new farms? Can a 'welfare check' become part of the new building approval process (just like an environmental impact assessment?).

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<sup>6</sup> Tail biting intervention programme ([SchwIP](#)), Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut (FLI), Germany.



**Minutes Regional meeting West  
Wageningen, April 29-30 2019**

- Enforcing welfare rules: Checklists and decision trees are used by some MS. They even have a dedicated *protocol or handbook for welfare inspections*. This should be detailed and specific enough. The question is whether this can be used *across the EU*? One country has good experience in another area of enforcement with a team of 'specialised inspectors'. Their experience is that training a small group is easier than a large group, and they quickly gain experience because they can focus on a particular area of legislation.

*Outcome/action: There is a need for a joint effort on a dedicated protocol or handbook for welfare inspections. This will be suggested to the Commission as a possible activity for EURCAW's working programme 2021-2022.*

**Evaluation**

- The delegates reviewed the meeting in a positive way. The program/basic format of the meeting is a good blue print for the next regional meeting(s);
- Two respondents to the evaluation suggested some kind of feedback/input from the farmers/industry, even though they are not the primary target group of EURCAW. It is decided to involve them in EURCAW's activities only in the role of experts if necessary, providing the information that inspectors need.

**Next regional meeting**

The next meeting is the Southern European regional meeting, planned for the second half of October 2019.

*EURCAW-Pigs*

*May 27, 2019*