

Question to EURCAW-Pigs

Question

"Nurseries: we understand that keeping a place to separate some pigs is necessary to deal with biting animals and/or victims (or sick animals), but it is hard for us to tell how many nursery pens are considered a minimum. Is 1 enough? Is 3% of all animals, or 5% considered sufficient?"

EURCAW's response

Prof. Lene Juul Pedersen and dr. Mette S. Herskin, Aarhus University (Denmark) wrote the initial reply. Additional suggestions were provided by dr. Hans Spoolder of Wageningen Livestock Research (NL). The EURCAW secretariat did the final editing. For queries: info.pigs@eurcaw.eu.

Answer

In the Council Directive 1998/58/EC it is stated that *"Any animal which appears to be ill or injured must be cared for appropriately without delay and, where an animal does not respond to such care, veterinary advice must be obtained as soon as possible. Where necessary sick or injured animals shall be isolated in suitable accommodation with, where appropriate, dry comfortable bedding."* (Annex, Article 4)

In Directive 2008/120/EC, the management and care of sick pigs are described as: *"pigs that have to be kept in groups, that are particularly aggressive, that have been attacked by other pigs or that are sick or injured may temporarily be kept in individual pens. In this case the individual pen used shall allow the animal to turn around easily if this is not in contradiction with specific veterinary advice"*. (Article 2, part 8). In the same Directive 2008/120/EC it is also stated that *"When signs of severe fighting appear the causes shall be immediately investigated and appropriate measures taken, such as providing plentiful straw to the animals, if possible, or other materials for investigation. Animals at risk or particularly aggressive animals shall be kept separate from the group"* (Paragraph 3 of section D of Chapter II of Annex I).

In addition, in the "The Commission Staff working document on best practice with a view to prevention of routine tail-docking and the provision of enrichment materials to pigs" it is specified that *"tail-bitten and tail-biting pigs should be isolated, while injured animals should be treated appropriately"*. This should be done promptly once evidence of tail-biting is discovered"

The legislation therefore does not specify how many hospital pens are considered a minimum or what resources should be provided in the pens. In addition, diagnoses requiring transfer to a hospital pen are not listed.

In the scientific literature the special needs of sick or injured pigs as well as the use and management of sickness pens have received very little attention. We found 2 surveys on the use of hospital pens. A Brazilian study in 2016 on 44 farms reports that 1.5% of available space is sufficient to avoid overcrowding of these pens. A UK study carried out in 2016 on 1928 farm units found up to 0.25% of pigs to require hospitalisation. They did not refer to the amount of space that would be required to house these pigs (which of course would be a larger percentage as these

animals need more space). So no exact recommendations can be given, based on scientific evidence.

However, it can be argued that the above requirements can only be met if the farmer can demonstrate it has a number of hospital pens available at the time of inspection, or that pens can be made available when necessary.

Practical consequences

As guidance to the amount of space that should be available to separate pigs for health and welfare reasons, the Danish Pig Research Centre (SEGES), recommends to their producers to always have room for 2.5% of the pigs in a herd in hospital pens and to adjust according to the health status of the farm. Please note that we do not have scientific underpinning of this figure.

Regarding the design of the pen, according to Danish national legislation, a sickness pen should be provided with specific resources such as possibility to thermoregulate, soft bedding and a larger area per pig than required for healthy animals. Danish inspectors have guidelines specifying which types of e.g. bedding can be acceptable in a sickness pen as well as a list of diagnoses requiring transfer to a sickness pen.

Relevant references

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