



Minutes Regional meeting South (Mediterranean region) Brescia, October 8-9 2019

EURCAW-Pigs organized its second regional meeting in Brescia, Italy, on 8-9 October, 2019. In total 6 delegates (CA's, policy workers) from member states IT, ES, PT, and GR, and 1 delegate from DG SANTE, attended. The venue of the meeting was Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale della Lombardia e dell'Emilia Romagna (IZSLER). Here also the Italian Reference Centre of Animal Welfare has its headquarters. The participants were welcomed by Giorgio Varisco, acting Director General and Luigi Bertocchi, head of the reference centre. Leonardo James Vinco represented and introduced the Italian Centre, and was the host during the meeting.

Discussion topics

The EURCAW-Pigs regional meetings aim to meet with the primary target groups of the reference centre: policy makers and competent authorities of the different European Member States. 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 participating in 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, and to prepare a 'reply' to be presented on the second day.

The topics were:

- Topic 1: Tail biting:

Tail biting is an ongoing project of the European Commission. It continues to be important to discuss the risk factors of tail biting and how to set protocols to evaluate the sectors' compliance with the pig welfare legislation requirements. Also it is important to share experiences on the implementation of the action plans and to try to set some harmonised schemes for the producers to decide when to tail dock/not tail dock. The monitoring of tail docking and tail biting at slaughterhouse is also discussed.

Expert: Antonia Patt, Animal welfare scientist, Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut (FLI), Germany;

- Topic 2: Sow group housing and mixing:

What are best practices for optimising introduction of gilts for the first time? What is more important in keeping aggression levels low and success rate: the group-housing system or (rearing) management factors? What animal based measures are suitable?

Expert: Hans Spolder, senior scientist in applied ethology, Wageningen Livestock Research, The Netherlands;

- Topic 3: Farrowing management and housing:

What are the strategies to eliminate or at least minimise the periods of severe restriction of sow movements?

And lactation strategies of hyperprolific sows?

Experts: Giovanni Alborali, Antonio Maisano, Giovanni Santucci, Federico Scali, IZSLER, Italy.



At the end of day 1, the invited topic experts started preparing their response. In the meantime, the ClassyFarm System was presented by Giovanni Alborali. ClassyFarm categorises Italian farms according to risks, using an integrated approach for veterinary public health. It allows the detection, collection and processing of data relating to areas of evaluation, such as biosecurity, animal welfare, antimicrobials, injuries detected at the slaughterhouse. The risk categorisation uses different sources: a self-audit by the farmer and official-audit by a vet officer (official-audit). It is available for pig farms, and soon also for cattle and poultry farms (and other species), and promoted by the Italian Ministry of Health.

Day 1 was concluded with a presentation from Katy Overstreet, anthropologist at Aarhus University, Denmark. Based on her work with Inger Anneberg, her talk was on how to handle farmers' ambivalence and resistance, and make change happen on the farm. A change from viewing it as a burden, towards an opportunity to improve the pig farming business. Changes are difficult, e.g. farmers experience inspection as a necessity but also as unfair and negative if something is found. Animal welfare inspectors often also have no formal education in communication. Motivational interviewing was introduced as a method for eliciting behaviour change by helping inspectors 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 empathetic way, and not to start an argument or confront, etc.

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: Tail biting:

- *Threshold tail lesions.* Several MSs suggest a 2% threshold for prevalence of tail lesions in docked pigs above which farmer can get a limited batch exemption and are permitted to tail dock on this limited basis. When the prevalence is lower than 2% in docked pigs it is advised to “start small”, in trials, with pigs with intact tails. The progress needs to be visible, either when successful or not. It should be a continuous cycle of improvement.
- *Assessment of tail lesions:* Lesions can be assessed on-farm or at the slaughterhouse.
 - For on-farm assessment, it is important for inspectors and farmers to agree on the way the tails are assessed and scored. It is therefore suggested to develop a factsheet, with a number of pictures per category of damage i.e. intact tails, tails with minor wounds and tails with major wounds. Farmers should incorporate assessment of tail lesions in routine management, and write this down/make records of this for each house on a daily basis. This is an existing legal requirement of point 8 of Annex I, Chapter I to Directive 2008/120/EC.
 - For monitoring of tail lesions at the abattoir, routinely usable schemes/methods are not available yet. There is an example from a scientific study: ‘Tailception’: using neural networks for assessing tail lesions on pictures of pig carcasses (Brünger et al. 2018). There are opportunities for conducting risk based farm inspections from utilising data

obtained from quality assurance schemes. Taking quality assurance data into consideration in the planning of risk based controls is a legal requirement of the new Official Controls Regulation (EC) No 625/2017.

- The sub group on pigs of the Animal Welfare Platform has also proposed methodologies that could be investigated as part of EURCAW's work programme.

Outcome/action:

- *EURCAW will develop a factsheet, visualizing three categories of tail damage on-farm, based on several pictures per category: intact tails, (docked) tails with minor lesions, (docked) tails with major lesions;*
 - *In the dossier we will refer to automated scoring at the abattoir, as this is not a topic for a fact sheet.*
- **Assessment protocol:** There appears to be a need for a standardised protocol to assist the verification of compliance with legislation. To support this, EURCAW-Pigs is currently describing a subset of indicators to be included in an assessment protocol. On the one hand, these are indicators of tail docking and tail biting, on the other hand indicators to assess the risks for tail biting, covering six key factor areas: enrichment, climate, health and fitness, competition over resources, diet, and pen structure/cleanliness. For permanent water supply it was discussed how valid/reliable this is for assessment? What is permanent, what is the threshold for enough or not enough?

Commission referred the group to an overview paper drawing conclusions on this subject from research based upon work done by ANSES and others. (Meunier-Salaün, M., Chiron, J., Etoire, F., Fabre, A., Laval, A., Pol, F., . . . Nielsen, B. (2017). Review: Drinking water for liquid-fed pigs. *Animal*, 11(5), p. 1).

Outcome/action:

- *In EURCAW's dossier and factsheets on tail biting, the indicators for monitoring (risks for) tail biting, will be based on feasibility, and will focus on extremes;*
 - *EURCAW was asked to compile information on the prevalence of tail lesions (in docked tails) to facilitate discussions on a threshold. Potential sources of information are trials conducted in practice and other epidemiological studies. EURCAW will propose this for the next Work Programme.*
- **Importance of rearing:** it seems that occurrence of tail biting is also based on origin of piglets (= farm effect), but scientific evidence on linking piglets with fattening pigs is missing. It is, however, a good practice not to mix piglets from multiple sources. Also, suitable enrichment material for piglets in farrowing unit is a way to reduce the risk for development of tail biting at a young age. However, this is often being neglected or forgotten.

Outcome/action: EURCAW should provide an overview of suitable enrichment material for piglets in the farrowing unit, as part of the "Farrowing management and housing" dossier.

Topic 2: Sow group housing and mixing:

- **Mixing of sows and gilts:** Extensive research shows that success factors are:
 - (Extra) Space (4 m²) and a dry solid floor (prevent slatted slippery floors: risk for lameness) around mixing;
 - Minimization of mixing moments;

- Preparing gilts for handling social contacts (e.g. gilts in group pen at a younger age, enrichment, training to use the feeding system).
- *Sow group housing in (early) pregnancy:* Extensive research shows that the farmer and the management is more important than the chosen system. The farmer should choose a system that fits well. Based on reproduction, mortality, skin lesions/damage, body condition:
 - Good results with all kinds of housing systems;
 - Management is most important factor: success factors are animal oriented management and rest and regularity;
 - Extra attention for gilts: especially surface of the housing before insemination, training (social skills and getting used to the feeding system for gestation), and nutrition during the rearing;
 - More space per sow = higher farrowing rate and lower replacement of parity 1 and 2 sows.

Outcome/action: EURCAW will publish a review, a dossier and two factsheets on this topic, as part of the activities of the work programme in 2020.

Topic 3: Farrowing management and housing:

- *Restriction of sow movements:* Sows are regularly kept as fixated as possible to prevent piglet-crushing and to lower effects of behavioural problems. This leads to reduced sow welfare, caused by restrictions to sow's movement and risks for lesions caused by crates. Free housing systems, in contrast, ensure sow's free of movement but include a high risk of piglet-crushing. A solution is a partial-restricted system as a free-movement system, integrated with a small restricted area. This may prevent piglet-crushing using a safe area restricted to the sow. It is also worth investigating improvement of farrowing crate systems, e.g. by enabling movement after some days. This requires an adaptation of the crate and more space. It is not exactly known whether this leads to an acceptable risk of piglet crushing.

Outcomes/actions: EURCAW is asked to:

- Give an overview of indicators of good/poor welfare of sows and piglets during farrowing. For piglets, it is also requested to include indicators of (too) early weaning (belly nosing?) and to provide guidance on weaning age. This is part of the activities of the EURCAW work programme in 2019: development of a review, a dossier and two factsheets on this topic;
- Develop guidelines for good practice on management during farrowing, including nesting materials, density;
- Identify 'demonstrator farms' for good examples: part of the EURCAW working programme 2019-2020. Commission added that there are already hundreds of potential demonstrator farms available in those countries that do not tail dock, and other demonstrator farms already sourced in other MS during the Commission's three year project on pig tail docking. All this information is available on the Commission's open CIRCABC network in the folders of the meetings that took place in Grange during 2016-18.
- Assist MS with guidance on data and production analysis for the assessment of piglet age in early weaning systems for those farms using hyperprolific sows and fostering using nurse sows- where the compilation of data, and systems is not straightforward.
- *Lactation strategies of hyperprolific sows:* A large increase of productivity of sows means that it is difficult to ensure there is enough colostrum - milk for all piglets. Also the risk for a lower litter uniformity and a lower birth weight average increases. Having nurse sows – by moving sows - is a



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strategy to increase productivity (higher number of weaners/sow), but it is a risk for internal biosecurity, and management is complicated. This also applies for cross-fostering (moving piglets) and early weaning. The latter strategy also has a negative effect on behaviour and health. A technical solution is also possible, with less risk for biosecurity, but leads to an increase in management costs.

Outcomes/actions: EURCAW is asked to:

- Identify best practices for lactation management. This is part of the activities of the EURCAW work programme in 2019: development of a review, a dossier and two factsheets on this topic;
- Develop specific training materials on this topic as part of Activity 4;

Evaluation

- For the next meetings, it is proposed to allow more specific questions to the experts, following selection of topics;
- Summarize the outcomes of the previous meeting(s);
- More time for discussion; two days instead of 1;
- Organize the next meeting(s) in a city with an airport, or at least easily accessible;
- Regional aspects: be involved in development of training materials/facilitate application in the region on national level;
- Prepare and test all the logistic and meeting materials in advance to save time during meetings;
- Organize thematic meetings , not per se regional, participatory (not too many presentations).

Next regional meeting

The next meeting will be held in the spring of 2020 in Denmark for the Nordic region.

EURCAW-Pigs

November 1, 2019