

The European Reference Centre for Animal Welfare – Pigs (EURCAW-Pigs) organized its first meeting of the EURCAW-Pigs Advisory Board (**AB**) on July 3, 2020. In 2020, it was planned to have two physical one-day meetings in Brussels. However, due to COVID-19, the first meeting was organized online, in Microsoft Teams. The second meeting will be at the end of 2020, either physical or online.

In the first meeting, the **AB** was represented by 10 delegates from business and professional organizations and from civil society organisations (see Annex 1 'List of participants'). They were asked to provide advice regarding the functioning and future activities of EURCAW-Pigs. The discussions during the AB meeting were conducted under the 'Chatham House Rule', implying that "participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the connection of the speaker(s) nor that of another participant may be changed or revealed".

Opening

Kirsten Sander-Vornhagen from unit G2 of DG SANTE opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the Advisory Board. She is the primary contact person at DG SANTE for the animal welfare reference centres. She also welcomed Virginie Michel, director and coordinator of the EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare – Poultry and Small-Farmed Animals, who was present as observer to the meeting. EURCAW-Pigs was chairing the meeting, and was represented by Hans Spooler, director and coordinator of the Centre, Jan Tind Sørensen and Marko Ruis, coordinators of training and dissemination/communication activities of the centre, respectively. Lars Schrader, who also coordinates activities for the Centre, could not attend due to unforeseen personal circumstances.

Dr Sander-Vornhagen clarified that the establishment of Animal Welfare Reference Centres is laid down in the Official Controls Regulation (Articles 95 & 96). Supporting the enforcement of pig welfare legislation is one of the Commission's priorities. In 2018, EURCAW-pigs was designated by the Commission to provide technical and scientific knowledge advice regarding the pig welfare legislation, to support Competent Authorities and policy workers of the EU Member States. This knowledge is on animal welfare in relation to husbandry, transport and slaughter and killing, without dealing with legal issues questions, i.e. interpretation of legislation. The latter is not part of the mandate of the centre.

Although not the primary target group of EURCAW, Dr Sander-Vornhagen emphasized the importance of the Advisory Board, by contributing expertise, advice and views to help improve the work of the Centre. These inputs are essential for its continued improvement. For this purpose, EURCAW-Pigs will also closely collaborate with the Centre for Poultry and small-farmed animals, as both centres can learn from each other.

EURCAW-Pigs main activities

Dr Spooler gave an overview of aims and way of working of EURCAW-Pigs. The Centre started at the beginning of 2019, and it has now been active for 1.5 years:

- (a) providing scientific and technical expertise, where appropriate in the form of coordinated assistance, to relevant national support networks and bodies;
- (b) providing scientific and technical expertise for the development and application of animal welfare indicators;

- (c) developing or coordinating the development of methods for the assessment of the level of welfare of animals and of methods for the improvement of the welfare of animals;
- (d) carrying out scientific and technical studies on the welfare of animals used for commercial or scientific purposes;
- (e) conducting training courses for staff of the national scientific support networks or bodies; and
- (f) disseminating research findings and technical innovations and collaborating with Union research bodies.”

This is ‘translated’ into five main activity areas, required by law (Art 96 of ‘The Official Controls Regulation), and addressed into the current Work Programme 2019-2020 (see website www.eurcaw-pigs.eu):

1. Coordinated assistance
2. Scientific and technical studies
3. Animal welfare indicators
4. Training courses
5. Dissemination

The EURCAW-Pigs’ team presented the current achievements in each activity, and the participants were asked for advice on how to improve or extend, and what to keep or further develop in the next Work Programme (two-year period; 2021-2022).

Activity 1: Coordinated assistance

Dr Spoolder introduced the Question and Answer service (Q2E), which offers easy access to knowledge for Competent Authorities and ministries. Questions may be asked via the contact email address info.pigs@eurcaw.eu and answers are provided by EURCAW-Pigs experts. Until now, 15 questions were received: from BE, NL, FR, FI, ES and one from the Commission. One could not be answered, and 12 answers are published on the website. Examples of Questions are: “How many sick pens are needed on a farm?” “Can nose rings cause injuries during transport?”

Another sub-activity is networking through various types of meetings. This includes attending meetings organised by others, e.g. EU Animal Welfare Platform, National Contacts for Reg (EU) 1099/2009, National Contacts for Reg (EU) 1/2005, National Reference Centres: FR, SE, FI, GR, IT, Better Training for Safer Food. In response to a question raised by the **AB**, it was clarified that visiting scientific meetings and conferences, or those organized by stakeholders, is no core business for the centre, and there is no budget allocated for this.

As part of the current work programme, EURCAW-Pigs also organizes 4 regional meetings with the primary target groups in that region. Upcoming regional meetings this year are the regional meeting East (16-17 November 2020; probably in Poland or Slovakia) and the Regional meeting North (Denmark 2-3 December 2020). In reply to a question of the **AB**; minutes of the previous regional meetings are published on EURCAW-Pigs’ website.

Activity 2: Scientific and technical studies

Prof Sørensen presented the Centre’s work on scientific reviews on eight welfare topics, on behalf of Prof Schrader. He was asked by the **AB** how the topics were selected. The topics were identified during the preparation of the current work programme, in 2018, by interviewing CA’s and policy workers, and also during a meeting at SANTE-F2 in Grange with policymakers and stakeholders. The **AB** also asked how to prevent

overlap with the EFSA reviews. Prof Sørensen replied, and this was confirmed by Dr Sander-Vornhagen, that the Centre's reviews focus on everyday inspections and to make things work on the spot during controls. However, a good understanding of pig welfare in relation to husbandry, transport and slaughter house practices is important for competent authority inspectors. For this purpose, EFSA's scientific information can be valuable and is taken into account. A Centre's review has a fixed structure: it first provides background information describing the biological relevance of the topic. It is then structured along the most important risk areas identified for that welfare area, describes why welfare issues occur and mentions the indicators that can help official inspectors to identify these welfare issues. To allow official inspectors to link these welfare areas with verification of compliance, each review then states relevant EU legislation. Finally, the review summarizes ways of good and better practices that can help to solve the previously described welfare problems. Reviews are now published on "Farrowing housing and management" and "Climate control and space allowance during transport". A review on "Handling in lairage" will be published" in July. The other topics and expected dates of publications can be found on the website. The **AB** congratulated the Centre with the review on "Farrowing housing and management".

Each review is 'translated' into a *thematic factsheet* and a *webdossier*. The thematic factsheets give a quick and easy overview of the topics. Each webdossier is a central source of technical information on a particular topic, with links to documents, factsheets, video's etc., structured around: legal aspects of the welfare issue, practical knowledge on welfare indicators, background information on the welfare issue, "demonstrators" (demonstrator farms, transport companies and abattoirs) and inspiring examples, and relevant training materials.

With respect to 'demonstrators', this is also a sub-activity and still 'under construction'. In cooperation with national scientific support bodies, e.g. national reference centres for animal welfare, EURCAW-Pigs is looking for demonstrators that demonstrate good practices on how to deal with welfare requirements of pigs during husbandry, transport as well as at slaughter and killing. One of the **AB** delegates offered contact details (to anyone who is interested) of farms, transporters and abattoirs that have successfully implemented improvements according to their welfare guidelines. EURCAW-Pigs will gratefully follow-up this opportunity. Demonstration of good practices are excellent ways and proven methods of dissemination of knowledge, exchanging ideas, harmonize assessments and change attitudes.

Activity 3: Animal welfare indicators

Dr Spoolder explained this activity on behalf of Prof Schrader. It is linked to the reviews in the previous activity, and describes relevant indicators for animal welfare, and develops indicator factsheets (relevance indicator, legal requirements, inspection and scoring methods). In order to harmonize the interpretation of animal welfare requirements and to verify compliance with the European pig welfare legislation, the Competent Authorities require standardized and relevant welfare indicators. The indicators are predominantly animal-based, but where appropriate are also resource-based. This activity will also develop so called 'ice berg indicators', which reflect major welfare issues in an integrative manner, to enable a quick assessment of the welfare status. It should be noted that they are never a comprehensive and representative indicator to replace

all other indicators. In fact, they are meant as a first impression to help the inspector, but also the farmer, to look closer. They are tools that help in discussions on animal welfare.

The **AB** brought up several questions and issues related to the use of indicators:

- ✓ There are a quite a few approaches with regard to indicators; does EURCAW-Pigs provide a single set of indicators, or a kind of catalogue where inspectors can choose from? Dr Spoolder replied that it is a single set of indicators or toolbox with the aim of looking in the same way (also to be used by farmers). Prof Sørensen added that it is a diagnostic tool to get more harmonized inspections across Europe. It was confirmed by the **AB** that indicators should be reliable, feasible, measurable and verifiable by all inspectors in the same way so as not to lead to different interpretations of the indicators;
- ✓ More frequent use of indicators may not necessarily led to more controls;
- ✓ Indicators do not point to single solutions, as there might be more than one cause of a welfare problem. Indicators indicate whether something is right or wrong, and may point to a need to find out where possible welfare problems come from;
- ✓ Indicators as such are not part of EU legislation, but can be used as instruments/tools to inspect whether open norms are complied with. Still, the decision on this lies with the official inspector (or ultimately the judge);
- ✓ There is a demand for 'predictive' ('early warning') indicators; could they be added to the toolbox for inspectors? Dr Spoolder replied that we mention them where appropriate in the current reviews, but we could give more specific and explicit attention to them. It was noted as a proposed suggestion for the new Work Programme.

4. Training courses

The activities related to training were presented by Prof Sørensen, and focus on the needs for pig welfare inspectors in Member States. EURCAW-Pigs describes examples of training plans and materials, suggests standards for new training activities, and produces guidelines for improvement of communication skills and ways to support inspection-driven welfare improvement. A training workshop for inspectors is planned for October 26-27 this year (Denmark). Knowledge from BTSF courses at EU level is cascaded to MS level by making links to relevant BTSF material and relevant national training courses will be described on EURCAW Pigs homepage.

The **AB** raised the issue that it would be good that pig practitioners/farmers should also benefit from training. The **AB** encouraged a transparent use of indicators, with the inspector and the farmer using the same indicators. 'Talking the same language' is important for a good dialogue between inspectors and farmers. Prof Sørensen replied that further training workshops are foreseen in the new work programme, and these can provide more focus on this topic. He also emphasized the importance of communication skills. A lot of research is done at Aarhus University on this topic, showing that the way the inspector communicates plays a major role in the farmers view and perception of the (welfare) situation. He suggests that future workshops should also include communication training.

Activity 5: Communication and dissemination

Dr Ruis gave a demonstration of EURCAW-Pigs' website www.eurcaw-pigs.eu, part of the dissemination and communication activities. The website is continuously updating and expanding with information, e.g. with output from EURCAW-Pigs' activities on coordinated assistance, science, welfare indicators and training. Part of dissemination is also the 'knowledge base' or repository that contains scientific, legal and technical documents on the relevant pig welfare issues. Documents can be found through a search engine on the homepage of EURCAW's website. Documents are categorized according to keywords, file format, publication type, year, language, author etc.

The **AB** brought forward that it is difficult to cascade from EU level to Member States level due to language issues. How can this be organized? Dr Spoolder replied that the current thinking is to have pages in six other languages, with on such a page a country's flag – or a language symbol as preferred by Dr Sander-Vornhagen – with a limited number of publications. EURCAW-Pigs welcomes contributions in time and money. The **AB** supports these translations and it was added that there can be a link between EURCAW-Pigs and national centres/scientific support bodies for this purpose. In addition, it has been proposed to set links on websites of stakeholder organisations, too, in order to raise visibility of the work of the centre and promote its activities. There also should be an official procedure to verify whether the translation is correct. With regard to a question on the availability of the website and its content for the coming years, Dr Sander-Vornhagen emphasized that this will be for the long-term, as the Centre is at least designated for 5 years.

Eight welfare topics (2019-2020)

Dr Spoolder briefly introduced the eight topics and the reason for inclusion in the Work Programme 2019-2020. They are: **Intact tails, Farrowing house management, Temperature & space during transport, Handling in lairage, Pig stunning techniques, Group-housing and mixing of sows, Fitness for transport and On-farm killing.**

The **AB** had the following suggestion and questions regarding these 8 areas:

- ✓ IRTA prepared guidelines (in Spanish) on On-farm killing to the Spanish Agriculture Ministry. This can be used as input for the corresponding review. The link will be sent to EURCAW-Pigs;
- ✓ Topics are well-chosen; how does the Centre continue with these topics as more work on them is needed. And how many new topics? This was further addressed in the next section.

New topics starting in 2021

For an exchange of new ideas for 2021 onwards Dr Spoolder first addressed potential new topics. They include Transport of sows and boars, Rearing entire boars, Design & management of Control Posts, Measuring farm welfare at abattoir, Welfare labels, Mass killing, Nitrogen for stunning, Piglet and sow mortality. He also suggested that the Centre's social scientists and communication advisors could work on skills for improving the dialogue between inspectors and chain partners. Finally, he addressed additional new or different ways of working: inspector stories/blogs, webinars, translations of output.

The **AB** was invited to prioritize and give suggestions for other topics and ideas. A summary of the topics that were discussed:

- ✓ Expand transport: Long transport important topic, including border controls and control posts. But focus should be on inspections;
- ✓ Expand enrichment/Intact tails: add the (automatic) scoring of tail lesions and missing tail parts at slaughter; adequate follow-up on routinely tail docked pigs (control of indication and if all other measures have been taken first; implementation of proper strategies to avoid in future batches);
- ✓ Expand Group housing of sows, by focus on prevention of hunger and stereotypies in sows;
- ✓ Expand Farrowing housing and management; alternatives of crate housing of sows was also mentioned. However, it was also questioned by the **AB**, as there is no legislation (but expected) on EU level regarding loose farrowing housing;
- ✓ Contingency planning to take adequate action in case emergencies happen, e.g. flooding, Covid-19, etc. An **AB** delegate offered assistance with knowledge regarding disaster relief.
- ✓ More explicit link of these topics with animal health and with the work of the OIE.
- ✓ Rearing entire boars, as castration is allowed by legislation. However, a comment is also made that policy workers also work on national level, and at national level there might be guidance on certain issues, such as on castration. From this perspective, entire boars may be a good topic. At the same time it also should be mentioned that the development in the market is not promising;
- ✓ Welfare labels is a topic for the longer-term, and is not at the same level as the other topics. Dr Sander-Vornhagen confirms that the Centre should not deal with this in the next 2-year programme.

Methods:

- ✓ Make sure that in the education and vocational training of CA and State Vets the animal welfare centres are playing a role and that every single person being on controls knows of the fact sheets. Make sure that the work of the reference centres is visible during education and courses to CAs in the MS.

The above suggestions will first be discussed within the EURCAW team, and if feasible added to a short list of possible options for the new Work Programme. The suggestions on the list will be included in a draft Work Programme which will be send to DG SANTE at the beginning of August 2020. The Commission is then asked to prioritise the suggestions, and depending on the available budget, a final list of activities will be agreed.

Closing

Drs Spoolder and Sander-Vornhagen closed the meeting, and were both very pleased with the amount of feedback. All participants will receive the notes of the meeting and have the opportunity to improve them prior to publication.

EURCAW-Pigs, 23 July 2020

Annex 1. List of participants

EURCAW-Pigs Advisory Board (AB)

European Forum of Farm Animal Breeders (EFFAB)

COPA

COGECA

European Livestock and Meat Trades Union (UECBV)

European Feed Manufacturers Federation (FEFAC)

European Federation of Animal Health Services (FESASS)

Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE)

Eurogroup for Animals

VIER PFOTEN International

DG SANTE

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