



*The EU Reference Centre of Animal Welfare (EURCAW) was established in 2018 by the DG SANTE to support EU Member States on issues related to the pig welfare legislation. As part of its activities, EURCAW-Pigs organises meetings with inspectors and other officials from EU Member States (MS). The meetings are an opportunity for officials to ask technical questions related to e.g. Directives 98/58/EC and 2008/120/EC (on farm), Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 (transport), and Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 (slaughter). These meetings are held with relatively small groups of officials and experts from the European centre, to give maximal attention to individual queries. They are held in different regions of Europe.*

The Regional meeting East was the third one in a series of four in 2019 and 2020. Due to the current COVID-19 situation the meeting was organized online (MS Teams). In total, 15 delegates from the Eastern European countries Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic participated. Furthermore, the meeting was attended by three delegates from DG SANTE, eight staff members of EURCAW-Pigs, and two staff members of EURCAW-Small Farmed Animals. The meeting started at 13:30 hours on the first day, and finished at 12:30 hours on the second day.

Kirsten Vornhagen from unit G2 of DG SANTE opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. She is the primary contact person at DG SANTE for the animal welfare reference centres. She looked forward to the participation and contribution in the meeting dedicated to the Eastern states, and invited the participants to visit the Commission's site for more details on activities as part of the Commission's busy calendar. The participants were also [welcomed](#) by Hans Spoolder, director and coordinator of EURCAW-Pigs. He introduced the aims and way of working of EURCAW-Pigs, and the agenda for the meeting.

## Discussion topics

The delegates participating in this meeting informed EURCAW-Pigs before the meeting which particular topic they wanted to be addressed. The topics could be selected from a list of eight welfare topics that EURCAW-Pigs is focussing on in its work programme. During the meeting, three of the proposed Welfare topics were discussed in detail. The proposers of the selected topics were asked to introduce their topic in a short presentation at the start of the meeting. Following these 'pitches', the topics were further discussed in subgroups, in which the topics changed every 20 minutes. For each topic, a different EURCAW-Pigs expert was invited to listen to the concerns, questions, personal experiences, and possible solutions added by the delegates. The expert was asked to understand the problem and solutions offered during the first day, and to prepare for an 'reply' to be presented on the second day.

The topics and experts were:

- Topic 1: Tail biting - Hans Spoolder, senior scientist in applied ethology, Wageningen Livestock Research, The Netherlands.
- Topic 2: Fitness for transport - Mette S. Herskin, animal welfare scientist, Aarhus University, Denmark
- Topic 3: On-farm killing - Inga Wilk, animal welfare scientist, Friedrich Loeffler Institut (FLI), Germany

## Intermezzos

Following the discussions in the subgroups and before closure of day 1, two 'intermezzos' were provided by EURCAW-Pigs team members: on EURCAW-Pigs website [www.eurcaw-pigs.eu](http://www.eurcaw-pigs.eu) (by Marko Ruis, Wageningen Livestock Research) and on EURCAW-Pigs [training activities and materials](#) (by Jan Tind Sørensen, Aarhus University).

The second day was opened with an intermezzo on [demonstrators](#) by Antje Schubbert (Friedrich Loeffler Institut (FLI)). "Seeing is believing": demonstration of good practices are an excellent ways to disseminate knowledge, exchanging ideas, harmonize assessments, and change attitudes. EURCAW-Pigs aims to identify farms, transport companies and abattoirs that demonstrate good practices regarding animal welfare, in compliance with EU legislation. Demonstrators will be presented on the EURCAW-Pigs website and the delegates were invited to share examples and contacts.

## Wrap-up three topics

Day 2 continued with the invited experts replying 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.

### Tail biting

As an introduction into the issues CA's are struggling with, Hans Spoolder started his presentation '[Tail docking and tail biting](#)' by stating that tail-docking, tooth-clipping and tooth grinding are likely to cause immediate pain and some prolonged pain to pigs, but that this is not the real problem. The real problem is why pigs bite tails: frustration and boredom, as pigs as intelligent animals are not challenged enough in barren environments. According to Council Directive 2008/120/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs, neither tail-docking nor reduction of corner teeth must be carried out routinely but only where there is evidence that injuries to sows' teats or to other pigs' ears or tails have occurred. Before carrying out these procedures, other measures shall be taken to prevent tail-biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities.

Main issues replied to:

- 1. How to do a risk assessment?* Commission Recommendation EU 336/2016 recommends in Art 2A-2 that MS should ensure that farmers carry out a risk assessment of the incidence of tail-biting based on animal and non-animal based indicators. This recommendation is not legally binding, but carries 'legal weight', and it was agreed by MS and pig sector. Six key factors should be checked when carrying out a risk assessment and these are described on the EURCAW-Pigs website, e.g. in the dossier '[Tail biting and tail docking](#)'. One solution provided to perform risk assessment in MS is having a risk assessment service by advisors, paid for by the government. Another solution is to use industry drivers to complement legal requirements, e.g. by including risk assessment in a quality assurance programme.
- 2. Farmers' hesitation to stop docking and making a change.* It is often assumed that docking is the cheapest and easiest way to avoid a tail biting outbreak, and farmers are reluctant to take the risk of not docking: they want a 'safety net'. Farmer, veterinarian & feed advisor therefore all need to support the aim and agree the

approach, to make changes. To move forward, a threshold level of damaged tails could be agreed, above which farmers can resort to docking. Two percent damaged tails at the abattoir was suggested by some as an average. Several countries do not have a threshold level and maybe it is too early to set a threshold. One country suggested to look at thresholds in relation to efforts made to reduce biting. This would require farmers to record biting: Measuring = Knowing = Increased awareness. More biting means more pressure on a remedial action plan. Farms that do not dock can be found in Sweden and Finland. These farms have solid floors and straw, trough feeding (wet feed) instead of dry pellets, cleaner pigs, and less mild and serious skin lesions. We also have several examples of farms outside these countries that earn money with undocked pigs. Several of these farms will be presented on the EURCAW-Pigs website later on.

Changing the mindset is very important, as tail biting happens on 50% of farms, with a prevalence of 2.1% in weaned piglets and finishing pigs (with docked tails!). The costs of tail damage due to tail biting are therefore high. Recently it was calculated that the damage for the entire Dutch pig sector (with most pigs docked!) amounts to an estimated €13 million per year (see Questions to EURCAW (Q2E): [‘191001-01 Costs of tail damage due to tail biting’](#)).

Making changes does not have to be a big ‘all or nothing’. One suggestion was to start small: what can you do to keep the tails on in a few pens only? Making small changes, monitor the progress and pay much attention to the pigs to take early actions are good ways to move forwards. Checklists and decision trees are used by some CA’s. They even have a dedicated protocol or handbook for welfare inspections. One country has good experience with a team of ‘specialised inspectors’ in another area of enforcement.

### **Fitness for transport**

Transport has a big impact on pig welfare, and it is one of the main topics in EURCAW-Pig’s Work programme. Information is available on the Centre’s website, e.g. in the dossier [‘Transport: Climate control and space allowance’](#). In this context, [‘Fitness for transport’](#) is also very important, being discussed on the first day in the subgroups, and wrapped up and replied to in a presentation by Mette S. Herskin. EURCAW-Pigs is also preparing a review on this topic, which will be available at the start of 2021.

Main issues replied to:

1. *What is fitness for transport?* We can explain what animal welfare is, what fear is, but we don’t have an agreed definition of fitness for transport. However, scientists agree that fitness for transport matters for animal welfare, as it is an important factor affecting the potential for suffering during animal transport. Regulation (EC) 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport says: “No animal shall be transported unless it is fit for the intended journey, and all animals shall be transported in conditions guaranteed not to cause them injury or unnecessary suffering.” And “Animals that are injured or that present physiological weaknesses or pathological processes shall not be considered fit for transport.”

2. *When are slaughter pigs fit for travel?* The regulation only specifies few conditions that could specifically apply to slaughter pigs; they are unfit for transport when, e.g. “they are unable to move independently without pain or to walk unassisted” and “they present a severe open wound, or prolapse”. But how to deal with for example bitten tails? When are wounded tails a major health issue, and should pigs be isolated and treated? Based on recent [EU-projects](#), pigs are considered unfit for transport when there is evidence of chewing or puncture wounds, with swelling and signs of infection. And what do we know about hernia pigs? Hernia has at least seven underlying conditions, probably with varying consequences for animal welfare. Exactly which

condition is involved is very difficult to determine *ante mortem*. During mixing-induced fighting, pigs attack/bite the hernia sack of other individuals. Hernias are considered as serious if it is more than 15-20 cm wide and especially if it presents sores. Illustrations, descriptions and decisions to assess fitness of pigs for transport, are part of the practical EU guidelines of the 'Animal Transport Guides' project. A copy of the guidelines can be [requested](#) via the project office.

3. *Training – what could be done?* To facilitate training, EURCAW-Pigs offers suggestions for training and continuing education courses for inspectors. [EURCAW training](#) is based on EURCAW reviews, indicators and website dossiers. For each topic, a training guide is developed as a standard and with suggestions for national training in EU Member States. For 'Fitness for transport' there will also be an example available at the start of 2021. As a training method, which can also be done online, tools for calibration between inspectors and practical training in calibration are suggested.

### On-farm killing

Inga Wilk addressed [three main issues](#) according to the discussions on day 1:

1. *Methods for the stunning and killing of non-viable pigs and piglets on farm.* These include mechanical and electrical (i.e. physical) methods and inhaled and non-inhaled (i.e. chemical) methods. Information on technical equipment was provided, and also special consideration was given to one-step killing methods (without debleeding).

2. *Methods for the mass depopulation of pigs in case of a disease outbreak (e.g. African Swine Fever).* The focus was on gas killing methods (CO<sub>2</sub>, argon, nitrogen and mixtures) using containerised gassing systems.

3. *Process control and safeguarding animal welfare.* Animal-based measures are measurable and objective outcome-based criteria to evaluate welfare. Important welfare consequences in the on-farm killing process corresponding to the state of consciousness are pain and fear. Pigs might experience pain and fear during ineffective killing with persistence of consciousness (stun failure) and/or during recovery of consciousness before death (re-awakening of the animals). Animal-based measures related to the state of consciousness after application of physical methods are posture, breathing, tonic/clonic seizures, corneal and palpebral reflex, vocalisation and eye movements. Death needs to be monitored and confirmed repeatedly after applying the killing method and before disposal of the carcass. State of death is indicated by a relaxed body, dilated pupils, and absence of breathing, corneal and palpebral reflex, and heartbeat. EFSA has combined the animal-based measures for the assessment of consciousness and death in descriptive toolboxes for each procedure.

The references used were inserted on the last slides of the presentation, but also a [separate list](#) of the references was provided.

### Closing and evaluation

The delegates reviewed the meeting in a positive way; they generally found it very informative and well-organized. The website was evaluated as well-structured, with a lot of information and many materials that can be used. Advices on how to organise the next meeting were to have a larger meeting to meet with other regions and to have more inspectors involved, and create space for training of inspectors. With regard to suggestions to improve the EURCAW services, translations of the most important output/deliverables was to the most important point to be taken up. The delegates found it very helpful to make the outputs, e.g.



factsheets and dossiers, available in different languages. They can help in providing translations, and EURCAW-Pigs can put it in the right visuals and format, and publish it on specific language pages on the website.

*Hans Spolder closed the workshop at 12:30 h*

EURCAW-Pigs  
December 4, 2020