

Pig Case Study France 1

Enriched indoor pig production system, Schleithal

Straw-based system with low stocking densities and freedom of movement for sows at all times

This is an enriched indoor system designed for high welfare. The sows and piglets have straw bedding and freedom of movement at all times. Despite this, piglet mortality rates were comparable to systems which use the farrowing crate.

On this farm, the buildings are either open sided or have access to outdoor runs so that the pigs get plenty of daylight and fresh air. The pens within the buildings are spacious and the farmer deliberately keeps the stocking rates low. All the pens contain deep-bedded straw at all stages of production. The straw gives the pigs the opportunity to forage, root and chew. It can also supplement their diet. All the straw bedding was in good condition. The farm was clean and tidy and appeared to be efficiently run.

The farm's high welfare status means that the farmer receives a premium for his pigs that is 10-15% higher than the conventional price. Images of pigs free to roam on deep straw are used in the farm's promotional brochure. The farm is also involved in the production of high quality hams and sausages. Some of these are sold directly from the farm shop and some are sold to local butchers and delicatessens. The farmer explained that high welfare and high quality are a good combination for marketing his products.



Feeding stalls help to prevent aggression amongst recently weaned dry sows and provide a cool retreat

Sows

The key welfare aspects for the sows are:

- Deep straw bedding for foraging and supplementing the diet



The sows are housed in spacious deep-bedded pens in an open sided building

- Electronic feeders to reduce aggression at feeding
- Open sided buildings for daylight and fresh air

The farm has 250 Large White x Landrace sows. Gilts and weaned sows are transferred to a large spacious service area where the boars are kept. The service area has lockable feeding stalls so that aggression at feeding time can be eliminated. During the day, the sows can also use the stalls to avoid aggressive interactions with other sows.

Once they have been served, the sows are moved to pens with electronic feeders. These pens are also open sided with deep bedding. The electronic feeders allow the sows to feed when they want up to several times a day. The sows that are on a restricted ration can also supplement their diet with straw.

The sows are kept in groups of 30. This group size is small enough for them to form a stable hierarchy so that aggression is reduced. Although there is some fighting when the sows are first mixed they soon settle down. The pens are approximately 12 x 20m so the sows have plenty of room to move around and exercise. This means that lameness is not much of a problem.

Most of the sows could be seen relaxing, nosing through the straw and chewing. As well as access to plenty of drinkers, the pens were also equipped with misters that can be turned on to cool the sows down in hot weather.

Veterinarians regularly inspected the sows. For this, the farmer paid a cost which worked out as 25 Euros per sow per year.

Farrowing sows

The key welfare aspects for the farrowing sows are:

- The sows have freedom of movement at all times
- The sows have straw for carrying out nest building
- The sows have individual pens to reduce disturbance

At farrowing time, the sows are transferred to individual farrowing pens. The nesting area measures approximately 1.5 x 2.5m and contains a good supply of fresh straw. Each pen has an external dunging area that can be accessed through a rubber flap. The sows have plenty of room to move around, exercise and perform nest building behaviour. The pens have high walls so that the sows are undisturbed by other pigs or stockpersons.



The pen provides good protection for the piglets from being accidentally squashed by the sow



The farrowing pen allows the sow to move around and build a nest

Piglets

The key welfare aspects for the piglets are:

- Good piglet protection devices to reduce the risk of accidental crushing
- The piglets are not subjected to teeth-clipping or tail-docking
- The male piglets receive an anaesthetic before castration

Once the piglets are born, some of the straw bedding is removed. This is to encourage them to use the heated creep box for resting and sleeping. The piglets are safer in the creep boxes and cannot be accidentally crushed by the sow. There are guard-rails within the nesting area to prevent the sow from squashing the piglets against the walls when she lies down. A central pole in the nest area further restricts the sow's movements. This is to slow down her movements making it less likely that she may accidentally step on one of her piglets.

The piglets are not subjected to all the mutilation practices that are seen in conventional production systems. They are not teeth-clipped. If there is evidence of damage to the sow's udder or to piglet faces, the farmer uses a teeth grinder. This is used

to blunt the tips of the eye-teeth. Teeth grinders cause much less pain and involve less risk of infection. In intensive production, the eye-teeth are usually clipped with pliers. This procedure causes pain and leaves the teeth open to infection.

The piglets are not tail-docked. This is because the pigs remain in enriched environments throughout their lives and are therefore unlikely to bite each other's tails. Unfortunately, the male piglets are castrated. This is insisted on by the buyers who don't want the risk of boar taint in the meat. To reduce stress and pain, each male piglet receives a course of 4 injections of local anaesthetic. Although this doubles the amount of time taken for the procedure, the farmer believes that it is worth it to reduce the amount of suffering.

The piglets have plenty of room in the farrowing pens to run around and play. The straw bedding within the pens provides a good form of environmental enrichment.

Growing pigs

The key welfare aspects for the growing pigs are:

- The pens have straw bedding
- Access to outdoor runs/open sided buildings
- Generous space allowance



The weaner pen has an outer exercise and excretion area

After weaning, the piglets are moved to weaner pens. These contain straw bedding and roofed kennels to keep the piglets warm. The kennel area is expanded as the piglets grow to give them more room. Space is restricted at the start to encourage the piglets to defaecate in an outer corridor that is open sided and has a roof. A small entrance with a rubber flap joins the kennel area and outer corridor. The piglets therefore have plenty of room to run around and play. The straw bedding provides behavioural enrichment.

As the pigs grow, they are moved to larger pens and group size is reduced from 80 in the weaner pens to

15-20 in the grower pens. In these smaller groups, the social structure is more stable and fighting is reduced. The grower pens also have an indoor area and an outer area measuring approximately 6 x 6m that is open sided. The pigs therefore have plenty of access to natural daylight and good ventilation. Both the inner and outer areas are deep bedded. This provides good opportunity for the pigs foraging activities. As a consequence, tail-biting is not a problem on this farm.



The grower/finisher pen is open sided for plenty of natural daylight and ventilation



The weaner pen contains straw bedding and a kennel to keep the piglets warm

Indoor pig production system	
Date of visit	19 November 2003
Certification scheme	Independent producer
Number of sows	250
Breed	Large White/Landrace
Food	Bought in for sows, home mix for growers
Average and maximum farrowings per sow	Average 6, maximum 7
Farrowings per year	2.4
% piglets stillborn	
% live born piglet mortality	12-15%
Average number of piglets weaned per farrowing	10.6 (25.4 per sow per year)
Mutilations	No teeth-clipping or tail-docking, anaesthetic used at castration
Weaning age	4 weeks
Growth rate	750g per day
Food conversion rate	
Weight when sold on or slaughtered	110kg
Transport to slaughter	60km
Price to farmer	10-15% above conventional price
Market	High quality hams and sausages
Number of stockpersons	3 full time
Number of inspections	2 per day
Health problems	Has had some diarrhoea in piglets
Other welfare issues identified	Mutilations (castration). Weaning age