

# ANIMAL WELFARE ASPECTS OF GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE: PIG PRODUCTION



# Animal Welfare Aspects of Good Agricultural Practice: pig production

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**Compassion in World Farming**

## Good Agricultural Practice

Good agricultural practice is a concept evolved by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

Good agricultural practices:

- Produce safe, healthy, high quality food for consumers
- Provide jobs with fair incomes for rural communities
- Are socially and environmentally sustainable
- Provide high standards of animal welfare

Good agricultural practice should help to achieve development that is both humane and sustainable. Compassion in World Farming is concerned that modern intensive systems of pig production cause suffering to pigs. Intensive farming contributes to rural job losses, environmental damage and health and food safety dangers.

This book addresses the animal welfare aspects of good agricultural practice in pig production. It uses a balanced combination of scientific knowledge and practical case studies to document attempts to improve welfare in a range of both indoor and outdoor pig production systems.

## Section 1. INTRODUCTION TO PIG WELFARE, BEHAVIOUR AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTENSIVE PRODUCTION

### Chapter 1. Introduction to animal welfare

Human beings have long been concerned about the welfare of animals and this concern is growing. The belief that we have some moral duty to care for animals has led to several attempts to define and conceptualise animal welfare. Three basic approaches have emerged:

- Is the biology of the animal normal?
- Is the animal in a good mental state?
- Is the animal living a natural life?

The first approach is based on the normal biological functioning including the physical and physiological condition of the animal. According to Broom (1986): 'The welfare of an animal is its state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment'. If conditions in the environment become difficult, animals use various methods to counteract any adverse affect. For example, if a sow becomes hot, she can change her behaviour and move into the shade; or she can change her physiology and start to sweat. If these regulatory systems allow her to cope then adaptation is said to occur. If the animal is unable to cope, then the individual is said to be stressed. Stress is an environmental effect on an individual which overtaxes its control systems and reduces its biological fitness (see Chapter 13 on stress physiology).

Normal biological functioning includes health. An animal in poor health is less able to cope and his or her welfare is at risk of being poorer. An animal suffering from high levels of stress is also more prone to diseases (Ekesbo, 1981) because stress can impair the immune system (see Chapter 14 on disease). An animal's welfare can therefore be assessed from a range of indicators including behaviour, physiology and health.

The second approach is based on what an animal actually feels. This involves the subjective experiences of the animal. The view is that positive feelings such as comfort and pleasure should be promoted while negative feelings such as pain and suffering should be reduced. These feelings can be assessed by examining an animal's preferences and motivations.

The third approach calls for animals to be raised in a

manner which suits the nature of the species or such that the animal is able to perform his or her full behavioural repertoire. All farm animals have inherited a range of behaviours from their wild ancestors that are created from needs. Inability to fulfil these needs can seriously affect an animal's welfare.

Webster (2005), sums up these different approaches as follows: Good welfare means an animal is 'fit and happy' or 'fit and feeling good'. In other words, in a good physical **and** mental state.

Good welfare is also about the absence of suffering. Suffering has been defined by one eminent welfare scientist to include a 'wide range of unpleasant emotional states' (Dawkins, 2000) including fear, frustration and pain. The World Veterinary Association (2000) have defined animal welfare as a scientific discipline which incorporates 'applied aspects of ethology, bioethics and the concepts of suffering and well-being'.

Photo: © MAEP/CIWF Trust



**Traditional African sow and piglet. Able to perform natural behaviour, but are her physical needs well catered for?**



**Sow in farrowing crate. In good physical condition, but does she suffer from restrictions on her natural behaviour?**

Physical and mental states indicative of suffering and well-being can not always be readily measured on farm. To this end, most codes of animal welfare switch the emphasis onto what should be provided for animals.

### The *Five Freedoms*

All animals have certain needs that have to be provided for if they are to experience good welfare. These needs are often expressed in terms of the *Five Freedoms*, adopted by the Farm Animal Welfare Council in the United Kingdom.

- 1) **Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition** - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
- 2) **Freedom from discomfort** - by providing a suitable environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
- 3) **Freedom from pain, injury and disease** - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
- 4) **Freedom to express normal behaviour** - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind
- 5) **Freedom from fear and distress** - by ensuring conditions which avoid mental suffering

Some would draw attention to the **freedom to choose their environment**, whether to go inside or out, whether to eat, drink or rest, whether to scratch their backs or wallow in mud. Animals are all individuals and their needs may not be the same. This freedom is of course qualified by the need to curtail choices which might be injurious to their health and safety.

How far do each of these systems provide for the *Five Freedoms* of farm animals?



The freedom to choose. These animals can wallow to cool down or seek shelter and huddle to keep warm

## Stockmanship and welfare potential



System with low welfare potential



System with high welfare potential. Good stockmanship is essential to achieve that potential

The day-to-day responsibility for ensuring that farm animals have all *Five Freedoms* lies with the stockperson. Good stockmanship is therefore a key factor in maintaining good welfare (see Chapter 15 on stockmanship). A good stockperson will often know how their animals are feeling by using observation, experience, common sense and empathy. They will look for evidence of both mental and physical welfare and deal with health and welfare problems intuitively.

Animals can suffer in any system if the stockmanship and management are poor, but systems vary in their **potential** for good welfare. No matter how experienced and conscientious the stockperson, welfare is inevitably compromised in the most intensive systems. There is a limit to what the stockperson can do to overcome the stress caused by close confinement, overcrowding, boredom and early weaning. The role of the stockperson in intensive systems is to ensure that there are no additional stressors.

The best free-range and organic systems can provide well for the behavioural needs of pigs. They are better able to cater for the diverse behavioural and environmental requirements of the animals. Welfare can be compromised in extensive systems but can generally be addressed by good stockmanship and management.

Farm animals deserve good systems as well as good stockmanship. Good stockpeople deserve good systems to give them a proper chance to achieve higher standards of welfare (see Chapter 17 on economic, environmental and social aspects).

### Why should farmers care about animal welfare?



Farmers and stockpeople are key welfare professionals

Animal welfare matters because it matters to the animal. They want things. There are other things they will go to any lengths to avoid. They can be excited, content, distressed or terrified. Just ask any stockperson! They can also be hungry, cold, bored or in pain. **Animals are sentient beings.** In other words, they have feelings that matter to them.

Good farmers and stockpeople know that good animal welfare can be good for productivity. For example:

- Giving growing pigs enough space increases their growth rates
- Pigs weaned later often grow better
- Changing to enriched free-range or deep bed systems can reduce cannibalism and tail-biting
- Training stockpeople to understand pigs better and improve their attitudes to them increases productivity

Stressed sows are more likely to savage their piglets. Stressed pigs are more likely to succumb to disease. Good welfare is good for the immune system and can lower mortality rates. Reducing stress levels can improve health and reproductive performance. Furthermore, reducing stress before slaughter improves meat quality (Grandin, 1991).

Happily, there are new markets for high welfare products. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware about the welfare implications of meat production and many are prepared to pay extra for high welfare products (see Chapter 17 on economic and social aspects). This kind of production lends itself particularly well to traditional small-scale farming that generally creates more employment in the rural community. A responsible approach to animal welfare, health and the environment can

only be positive in the long run for the status of farming in the wider community.

Good farmers care about the welfare of their animals. The work of the stockperson is far more satisfying if they know the animals in their care are content and thriving.

Good treatment of animals is good for society. There is much evidence that violence to animals often leads to violence to people (Ascione and Arkow, 1999). Conversely, societies which care for the welfare of animals often look after each other better too.

Farm animals comprise the vast majority of domesticated animals. Therefore, farmers and stockpeople probably contribute far more to the welfare of animals, whether for good or ill, than any other professional group.

## Summary

The welfare state of an animal can be described as good or high if the individual is fit, healthy, happy and free from suffering. Farm animal welfare depends largely on the following key factors:

- Good stockmanship
- Good environments in which to live
- Good disease control
- Good genetics

Further information about each of these factors can be found in the relevant chapters.