

## Chapter 9. Boars



Boars are too often kept in isolation without bedding

In some intensive farms in certain parts of the world, boars receive similar treatment to sows. Some are kept in stalls and bedding is often not provided. Another problem for boars is that they are often kept isolated from other pigs.

Lack of bedding can have two consequences for welfare. Firstly, boars may lose their foothold while serving the sow and this can lead to leg damage. Secondly, boars are fed a maintenance ration like sows to prevent them from becoming overweight. Boars are therefore likely to suffer from the same problems of hunger as experienced by sows. In stalls they are also, like sows, likely to suffer boredom and health problems as a result of not being able to perform many natural behaviours.

Boars are often kept singly because problems caused by fighting and aggression are the most severe with boars. If fights break out, a subordinate boar needs space to escape from aggression. This is not normally possible in indoor systems.



"Teaser" boar next to sows in sow stall, Brazil – boars are often given more space but, outside the EU, are also often kept in stalls

### Good Agricultural Practice – addressing the welfare needs of boars



Boar accommodation (on right) at Sparsholt College, UK. EU rules require boars to be provided with space to turn around, access to manipulable materials such as straw and to be able to hear, smell and see other pigs

The welfare of boars can be improved by:

- Giving them plenty of space to exercise and carry out natural behaviours
- Providing bedding for easy foothold, comfort, hunger relief and occupation
- Ensuring visual and, where possible physical, access to other pigs at all times

Across the world, many intensive farms do not keep their boars in stall cages, but keep them in small pens with some freedom of movement. Boars often receive better treatment because they are the most

highly valued animals on the farm. This is because boars are used to improve the genetics of the herd. They have therefore been bred to carry the latest genetics for whatever the desired characteristics are.

Although boars can live with each other if they have been brought up together since birth, they are usually housed separately to prevent fighting and aggression. The pens are usually large enough to house the boar and one or more female sows that are there to be served or mated. Some boar pens are bedded to provide good foothold while the boar is serving the sow.

On most farms, boars have visual access to other pigs (usually the sows). This is primarily so that it is easier for the stockperson to recognise any sows that have returned on heat. Sows returning on heat will spend a lot of their time close to where the boar is. However this is not always the case. EU law now stipulates that boars must not be visually isolated from other pigs.

In Soukroma organic farm in the Czech Republic boars are introduced, one at a time, to the family groups of sows and their piglets. Boars are rotated between the different family groups since sows vary in their mating preferences!



**Boars also need access to high fibre food to prevent hunger**



**Family group system, Soukroma organic farm, Czech Republic**

## Outdoor systems



**Team of boars in dry sow enclosure, Fittleworth farm, UK**

Again, outdoor systems can have the best potential for good boar welfare. Some outdoor farms allow 'teams' of 2-3 boars to live together in large paddocks with recently weaned sows. Risks of aggression are reduced by using groups of boars which have grown up together and by ensuring that any subordinate boar has plenty of space to escape from aggressive encounters.

Problems arise when one or more boars die or have to be removed from the group. Introducing a new boar cannot be recommended. Eastbrook farm never introduce new members to a boar-team. Where a single boar is "left over" from a boar team, he is grouped with sows which have recently been mated as a precaution in case any of them come back into oestrus.



**Brothers can often be reared together amicably in free-range systems**



Boar in family group enclosure at Eastbrook organic farm, UK

## Summary

Boars in intensive systems may suffer from:

- Hunger due to restricted diet and lack of high fibre food
- Confinement in stalls (less common than for sows)
- Isolation from other pigs
- Barren environments

Boars in extensive systems can suffer serious aggression and injury from other boars, especially if mixed with boars they are not familiar with.

It is Good Agricultural Practice:

- To provide boars with space for exercise
- To provide plenty of bedding for comfort and foraging
- To keep boars in the company of other pigs and, where this is not possible, to ensure close visual and nasal contact with other pigs

Boars can be kept in groups if reared together and given plenty of space to escape aggression.