

THE STATE OF EUROPE'S PIGS: AN EXPOSÉ



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**AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORT BY COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A shocking new study of Europe's pig farming shows that pigs are all too often kept in barren conditions and basic European laws are routinely flouted.

Our undercover investigation into 60 farms over five key pig producing countries (Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom) revealed routine tail docking, lack of environmental enrichment and generally extremely poor welfare.

EU statistics back up our findings, as according to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), over 90 per cent of pigs are tail docked.

INTRODUCTION: THE STATE OF EUROPE'S PIGS – AN EXPOSÉ

Conducting an undercover investigation in a large selection of farms across Europe (Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom) Compassion in World Farming found examples of poor welfare and excessive use of confinement systems and mutilations in lieu of good welfare practices. The investigation paints a portrait of pig farming practices across the whole EU.

The project focused on identifying and recording the incidence of a number of key welfare indicators particularly mutilations such as tail docking and the provision of environmental enrichments – defined as materials which enable proper investigation and manipulation activities.

Whilst the regions in individual countries on which investigators focused were selected on the basis of their importance to that country's pig production industry, Compassion investigators did not know in advance what kind of conditions they could expect to find on the individual farms visited.

EXPOSÉ FINDINGS

“In general the situation of the pigs was very alike in all countries we visited,” explains Compassion in World Farming’s investigator. “The pigs looked uncared for, they showed aggressive behaviour and there was nothing for the pigs to do. The floors were bare, space was very little and the places very dirty.

“Its horrifying to imagine that most of the meat sold in the supermarkets, restaurants and that we see in daily life [coming from animals] is being kept in these conditions.”

The investigation illustrates the effects of an industrial system on a highly sentient, intelligent animal - focusing on sow stalls, farrowing crates, routine mutilations and a lack of proper environmental enrichments and bedding.

Across Europe, pig legislation is being ignored and conditions are often appalling.

a. At a glance

Country	Prevalence of tail docking (% of farms visited)	No or ineffective environmental enrichment (% of farms visited)
Germany	79%	89%
Hungary	70%	70%
Netherlands	100%	88%
Spain	100%	100%
United Kingdom	54%	36%

b. Country by country

Germany

Investigators documented the conditions of a total of 19 farms in two key pig-producing regions: Vechta County in Niedersachsen, where production appeared to be on an industrial scale and included elements such as automatic feeding systems, and Warenberg County in Nordrhein-Westfalen, where production appeared to be carried out in marginally less industrial systems.

- **In 79% of German farms visited, a significant number of tail docked pigs were present**
- **In 89% of German farms visited, there was either no or ineffective environmental enrichment.**



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Hungary

Investigators were able to record the conditions of a total of ten farms centred around Szeged in Csongrad and Bekes Counties, key pig producing regions.

Pig production was found to be carried out typically in enclosed high volume industrialised farms with slurry run-off ditches, often secured by high barbed wire fences and hidden from general view. Limited access to outdoor space, though generally not grass or pasture was sometimes available.

- **In 70% of Hungarian farms visited, a significant number of tail docked pigs were present**
- **In 70% of Hungarian farms visited, there was either no or ineffective environmental enrichment.**

Netherlands

Conditions at a total of nine farms were documented, eight in the provinces of North Brabant and one in Zuid-Holland.

All but one of the farms seemed to be individually owned and operated with pig facilities located close to other farm operations and the houses of presumably, the owners/operators. The one farm visited in the Zuid-Holland region appeared to be owned and run at a 'corporate' level.



Photo © Compassion in World Farming

- **In 100% of Netherland farms visited, a significant number of tail docked pigs were present**
- **In 88% of Netherland farms visited, there was either no or ineffective environmental enrichment.**

Spain

Investigators were able to record the conditions of a total of eleven farms centred around Vic, one of the country's key pig producing centres.

A range of production methods was found, from highly industrial to smaller scale operations. Many individual animals were in poor condition across the farms visited, suffering from a range of injuries including ear biting. Aggression, apparently caused by environmental factors such as lack of space was a significant trait observed in this country.

- **In 100% of Spanish farms visited, a significant number of tail docked pigs were present**
- **In 100% of Spanish farms visited there was either no or ineffective environmental enrichment.**

United Kingdom



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Investigators were able to document conditions at a total of eleven farms, focusing on key pig-producing regions in the East Riding of Yorkshire and the East Anglian county of Suffolk. Investigators were able to gather information regarding welfare conditions at six farms in Yorkshire and five in Suffolk.

Interestingly, whilst general conditions at some farms matched the welfare failings already witnessed in other countries in Europe, a higher proportion of farms had access to outdoor space for animals.

Significantly, in comparison to the four other European countries visited, the use of sow stalls is not permitted.

- **In 54% of UK farms visited a significant number of tail docked pigs were present**
- **In 36% of UK farms visited there was either no or ineffective environmental enrichment.**

BRITISH VERSUS EUROPEAN PIG FARMING: THE FACTS

The British pig industry is ahead of European counterparts because:

1. Sow stall cages were banned in 1999
2. Castration is rarely practised and banned from most assurance schemes
3. Straw is used by a proportion of pig farmers
4. Around 40 per cent of breeding sows in Britain are kept outdoors
5. Supermarkets are beginning to provide pig meat labels for consumers such as “free-range”, “outdoor bred and reared” and “straw bedding provided”

But to be truly high welfare the British pig industry needs to address:

1. Many British pigs are still kept in often overcrowded pens with bare floors – factory farming conditions equivalent to intensively kept chickens
2. Although an estimated 40 per cent of piglets are born to sows kept outdoors, only around seven per cent are reared outdoors after weaning and only two per cent are finished outdoors
3. Around 80 per cent of British pigs are tail docked despite the 2003 EU ban on routine tail docking
4. Neither country of origin nor method of production is legally required on labels
5. Many British sows are confined in farrowing crates (similar to sow stalls but just before and post birth).

The UK import market:

Product	Consumed in the UK in 2007 (tonnes)*	Imported or UK produced from imported pig meat	Percentage of pig meat imported
Pork	921 000	412 000	45%
Bacon	450 000	364 000	81%
All pig meat	1 563 000	970 000	62%

Source: UK Yearbook 2008 – Meat & Livestock, AHDB Meat Services, MLC Economics
 *Pork and all pig meat are carcass weight equivalent, bacon is product weight

- Over 40 per cent of pork and around 80 per cent of bacon consumed in the UK is imported or UK produced from imported pig meat
- In 2007 the UK consumed 1.56 million tonnes of pig meat, making pigs second only to poultry (1.63 million tonnes) in the amount consumed
- Overall, over 60 per cent of pig meat consumed in the UK is from pigs reared outside the UK and only around 30 per cent of this imported pig meat meets UK standards
- The main sources of pig meat imported to the UK are Denmark, Netherlands and Germany

THE WELFARE OF PIGS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Around 250 million pigs are slaughtered each year in the EU.¹ The vast majority are farmed industrially.

There are two main kinds of pigs on farms:

- Breeding sows whose role is to produce piglets
- Fattening pigs that are reared for their meat

Breeding sows – the mother pigs

Most sows in the EU are confined throughout their 16.5 week pregnancy in sow stalls. These metal-barred stalls are so narrow that the sow cannot even turn round. She is kept like this for one pregnancy after another.



Photo © Compassion in World Farming

Sow stalls have been banned in the EU from 2013. However, even after 2013 farmers will still be able to use these inhumane stalls during the first four weeks of pregnancy. A scientific report by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has concluded that keeping sows in stalls for the first four weeks of pregnancy is damaging to their health and welfare.²

Compassion in World Farming believes that the ‘first four weeks’ exception should be removed, i.e. sow stalls should be banned throughout the pregnancy. Sow stalls have

¹ European Commission: Eurostat & DG Agriculture

² Scientific Report on animal health and welfare aspects of different housing and husbandry systems for adult breeding boars, pregnant, farrowing sows and unweaned piglets. Report by Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare of European Food Safety Authority. Adopted 10 October 2007.

already been banned in the UNITED KINGDOM and Sweden and the bans apply during the whole pregnancy.

In natural conditions, a day or two before giving birth, a sow will build a nest of grass, twigs, leaves and branches. In industrial farms, however, a few days before giving birth, the sow is moved to a farrowing crate. The extreme lack of space in the crate means that she can barely move; indeed there is not even enough room to allow her to lie normally. In the crate the sow cannot fulfill her strong instinct to build a nest. Nor can she mother her piglets properly. The sow is kept in the crate until her piglets are weaned at three to four weeks of age.

Compassion believes that farrowing crates should be phased out by law. Farmers assert that the crate is necessary to prevent the sow from crushing her piglets by lying on them. Recent research, however, shows that well-designed farrowing pens in which the sow has ample space can be just as effective as crates in preventing piglet mortality. Analysis of data from Swiss farms –where farrowing crates have been banned – has found that piglet mortalities in farms using loose farrowing systems are no higher than in farms that use crates.³

Photo © Compassion in World Farming



Fattening pigs

Most fattening pigs in the EU are kept indoors in conditions of utter deprivation – in overcrowded, barren, often dirty sheds. They are kept on bare concrete or fully slatted floors with no straw or other bedding. Stocking densities are often high. In these conditions pigs are unable to perform key natural behaviours.

EU stocking densities for growing pigs



Live Weight (kg)	Space Allowance (M ²)	Approximate Age
<10	0.15	
10-20	0.20	60 days
20-30	0.30	
30-50	0.40	100 days
50-85	0.55	
85-110	0.65	170 days (earliest sent to slaughter)
>110	1.00	

Scientific research shows that in natural conditions pigs are highly active, spending 75 per cent of their day rooting, foraging and exploring.⁴ Such activities are impossible for factory

³ Weber et al, 2007. Piglet mortality on farms using farrowing systems with or without crates. *Animal Welfare* 16: 277-279.

farmed pigs. The lack of straw or other natural materials prevents the pigs from carrying out their natural behaviours. Bored and frustrated, they turn to the only other 'thing' in their bare pens: the tails of other pigs. They begin to chew and then bite those tails.

To prevent tail biting, farmers slice off (dock) part of the piglet's tail. A 2007 EFSA report found that over 90 per cent of EU piglets are tail docked despite the fact that routine tail docking has been illegal in the EU since 2003.⁵

Scientific research has for many years shown that the correct way to prevent tail biting is not to dock the tails, but to keep the pigs in good conditions. EU law requires pigs to be given straw or some similar materials to enable them to engage in their natural behaviours of rooting, foraging and investigating. However, most EU farmers ignore this law.

Compassion urges the Commission and the Member States to enforce the legislation that requires pigs to be given materials such as straw and prohibits routine tail docking. Some countries – Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, Norway and Switzerland – already properly enforce bans on tail docking.⁶

Castration

Around 250 000 pigs are castrated each day in the EU, usually without anaesthetic. This causes both acute and prolonged pain.⁷ Castration is banned in Norway from 2009 and castration without anaesthetic is banned in Switzerland from 2009. Castration is not performed in the United Kingdom and Ireland and the majority of male pigs in Spain and Portugal are not castrated. In the Netherlands, anaesthesia with CO₂ has been developed for castration. Compassion believes that castration should be prohibited throughout the EU.

⁴ Stolba A. and Woodgush D.G.M., 1989. The behaviour of pigs in a semi-natural environment. *Animal Protection* **48**: 419-425.

⁵ Scientific Report of the Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from Commission on the risks associated with tail biting in pigs and possible means to reduce the need for tail docking considering the different housing and husbandry systems. *The EFSA Journal* (2007) 611, 1-98.

⁶ As 5

⁷ Opinion of the Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare on a request from the Commission related to welfare aspects of the castration of piglets, *The EFSA Journal* (2004) 91, 1-18.

HOW PIGS SHOULD BE KEPT

Pigs should be farmed outdoors in well-managed free-range systems. Alternatively, they may be kept indoors in well ventilated barns with straw bedding, ample space and daylight.



Photo © Compassion in World Farming

Pigs are highly intelligent creatures and need a rich, stimulating environment.

✓ We say yes to:

- ✓ Space to move around
- ✓ Outdoor access
- ✓ Straw to forage, nest and rest indoors

X But no to:

- x Any mutilations such as castration, tail docking and tooth clipping
- x Sow stalls (banned in UK and Swedish pig farming) and farrowing crates
- x A dull, barren environment

CONSUMERS & LABELLING

Consumers can help by buying pork and bacon that is free range, organic or comes from pigs reared under one of Europe's high welfare schemes such as *Label Rouge* in France, *Neuland* in Germany or *RSPCA Freedom Food*™ in the United Kingdom.

EU law requires egg packs to be labelled as to farming method. So that consumers can make informed choices, this law should be extended to pork and bacon, requiring these products too to be labelled as to farming method.

In the UK look out for:

- **Organic** particularly Soil Association guarantees the highest welfare standards
- **Free-range, outdoor bred and outdoor reared** offer higher welfare potential but these labels still lack legal definition
- **RSPCA Freedom Food**™ (indoor and outdoor systems) offers higher welfare but allows limited use of farrowing crates
- **British** does not guarantee good welfare but is better than imported unless supermarket stipulates UK standards

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGE TO THE EU

The state of Europe's pigs, as this report has revealed, is shocking. Urgent action is needed by the EU to address the low welfare standards practised across the European Union.

The EU must take seriously its current legislation and ensure that legal requirements are met without fail. Enforcement of its laws will lead to substantial welfare improvements. As the EU begins to review the Pigs Directive in 2009 it must seek to improve the conditions of pig farming.

Compassion in World Farming specifically wants to see the following alterations to the Pigs Directive:

- **A complete ban on sow stalls from 2013.** This will mean removing the exception which will allow sows to be kept in stalls for the first four weeks of pregnancy. EFSA also condemns this exception, concluding that crating sows for four weeks after service impairs welfare.
- **A ban on farrowing crates.** Recent research shows that well-designed farrowing pens in which the sow has ample space can be just as effective as crates in preventing piglet mortality. Analysis of data from Swiss farms has found that piglet mortalities in farms using loose farrowing systems were no higher than those in farms that used crates (Weber and others, 2007).
- **A ban on painful mutilations.** Tooth clipping and castration. EFSA concludes that castration and tooth clipping cause both acute and long term pain.
- **The enforcement of the existing ban on tail docking.** Routine tail docking is prohibited by the Directive but EFSA reports that over 90 per cent of EU piglets are still tail docked. We need improved enforcement and stronger wording in the Directive.
- **Provision of straw.** Environmental enrichment needs to be improved and enforced to ensure all pigs have straw for foraging and bedding and fully slatted floors should be banned. EFSA stresses that enrichment materials are of great importance for pigs and that straw is particularly suitable. We believe that all pigs should be provided with straw (or similar natural material) for enrichment; moreover, the amount of straw supplied should be sufficient to act as bedding. The Directive already requires the provision of enrichment materials but reports by the EU Food and Veterinary Office show that this requirement is widely ignored. To remedy this situation, improved enforcement and stronger wording in the Directive are required.
- **Enhanced space allowance** for fattening pigs.

ABOUT COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING

Compassion in World Farming was founded in 1967 by a British dairy farmer, Peter Roberts MBE, who became horrified by the development of modern, intensive factory farming.

Since then, we have been investigating, campaigning against and alleviating the suffering of millions of farm animals around the world; changing legislation and the way people think about food and farming.

Today, Compassion in World Farming is the leading international charity campaigning exclusively for the welfare of animals farmed for food.

Quite simply, we believe farm animals should not, and need not, suffer.

Our history of achievement in attaining higher welfare standards for pigs

- 1999** Ban on sow stalls in the United Kingdom
- 2001** EU legislation prohibiting *routine* tail-docking and teeth-clipping and requiring enrichment materials such as straw to be provided
- 2001** EU sow stall ban is agreed to come into effect in 2013
- 2005/06** Compassion investigation exposed pig slaughter conditions in Poland
- 2006** Ban on tethering of sows in the EU
- 2013** EU ban on the use of sow stalls after first 4 weeks of pregnancy comes into force

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