



## **Inquiry into the English pig industry**

**By the Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee**

### **Submission by Compassion in World Farming**

#### **Executive Summary**

1. The cost of the UK ban on sow stalls is often overestimated. Authoritative industry data indicate that moving from sow stalls to group housing added just 2 pence to the cost of producing 1 kg. of pigmeat.
2. English pig farmers have higher welfare standards than many of their continental competitors. However, that does not mean that all is well as regards welfare standards in the English pig industry. Most English sows are kept in farrowing crates; these place severe restrictions on movement and on sows' nest building and mothering behaviours. Farrowing crates should be phased out as recent research demonstrates that well-designed farrowing pens in which the sow has ample space can be just as effective as crates in preventing piglet mortality.
3. Many English fattening pigs are kept in barren conditions and are routinely tail docked. Since 2003 EU legislation has required pigs to be given environmental enrichment and has banned routine tail docking. Many English farmers are ignoring this legislation: 80% of UK pigs are tail docked and many farmers fail to provide straw or some similar natural material and instead simply supply chains or toys despite the scientific evidence that these are fundamentally unsatisfactory as enrichment materials.
4. British consumers are increasingly demanding high welfare products. This is particularly evident in eggs and chicken meat. Similar developments are likely as

regards pigmeat. British pig farmers should prepare themselves to benefit from this opportunity by adopting genuinely high welfare standards.

5. Supermarkets should not stock - and public sector bodies should not purchase - imported pigmeat produced to lower welfare standards than UK pigmeat; this principle should apply to all pigmeat whether fresh, frozen or processed, and whether own brand or branded product.

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### **Impact of domestic welfare standards on competitiveness**

6. The English industry tends to assert that the UK ban on sow stalls is the principal factor behind the decline in sow numbers in England. The suggestion is that the move away from stalls has greatly increased production costs. However, this contention is not borne out by the industry's own data.

7. In the late 90s Grampian Country Foods, then the UK's largest pig producer, pointed out that pigment production costs in the UK were 44p/kg higher than on the continent. Grampian stated that only 2p/kg of this was due to the ban on stalls; the majority of the extra costs resulted from the then strength of sterling and the fact that at that time meat and bone meal had been banned in the UK but not on the continent.

8. Similarly, a study by the Meat and Livestock Commission in 1999, the year that the sow stall ban came into force, found that moving from sow stalls to group housing added just 1.6 pence to the cost of producing 1 kg. of pigmeat. French and Dutch studies show that even in the better group housing systems – ones giving reasonable space and ample straw – a kg. of pigmeat costs less than 2 pence more to produce than in sow stalls.

### **Welfare standards in the English pig industry**

9. Compassion in World Farming (Compassion) recognises that English pig farmers have higher welfare standards than many of their continental competitors. Sow stalls have been banned and castration is prohibited by Assured British Pigs who assure the vast majority of production. However, that does not mean that all is well as regards welfare in the English industry.

10. English farmers are right to be proud of their achievements in abandoning sow stalls and not castrating male pigs. However, a number of serious welfare problems continue to affect English pigs. Most sows are still confined in farrowing crates and many fattening pigs are kept in barren pens with no effective enrichment and are routinely tail docked.

### ***Farrowing crates***

11. Most English sows are placed in farrowing crates about 5 days before giving birth; the sow is kept in the crate until the piglets are weaned at 3-4 weeks of age. These crates are very restrictive; the extreme lack of space means that the sow cannot move other than to stand up and lie down.

12. Scientific research has established that sows have a very strong instinct to build a nest for their piglets shortly before giving birth. In semi-natural conditions, the sow will exhibit intense nest-building behaviour, first excavating a hollow and then gathering leaves, grass and twigs. In a farrowing crate, it is impossible for a sow to fulfil her strong nest-building instincts. Nor, once they are born, can she mother her piglets properly. The prevention of natural behaviour in crated sows is highly stressful (Weber and others, 2007).

13. The use of farrowing crates is defended by the argument that piglet mortality is lower in crates than in loose-housed sows. However, recent research shows that well-designed farrowing pens in which the sow has ample space can be just as effective 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).

14. The EU Pigs Directive is due to be revised shortly. Compassion believes that farrowing crates should be phased out on an EU-wide basis. It is entirely proper for farmers to be cautious about moving to systems which require experience for effective operation. This is all the more reason for the British industry to develop the necessary expertise as soon as possible to ensure that Britain remains in the forefront of high welfare production.

15. Most crushing deaths occur in the first three days after birth. It would be an important step in the right direction to develop systems which release the sow a few

days after farrowing. However, this would not deal with the problem of frustration during the nesting-building period nor with the sow's need to initiate contact with her piglets shortly after birth. This is not a long-term solution.

### ***Fattening pigs***

16. The term “fattening pigs” is used in this submission to refer to pigs reared for meat as opposed to sows kept for breeding.

17. Although there is no reliable figure on this point, we estimate that around 40-50% of British fattening pigs are kept in barren conditions with no effective environmental enrichment and are routinely tail docked. In these circumstances welfare outcomes are poor.

18. Since 2003 EU legislation has:

- required that pigs be given environmental enrichment, specifically they must have “permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities, such as straw, hay, wood, sawdust, mushroom compost, peat or a mixture of such ...”
- prohibited routine tail docking. Under the legislation tail docking may only be used as a last resort. The law provides that farmers must first take measures to improve the pigs' conditions and, only where these have failed to prevent tail biting, may they tail dock.

### Environmental enrichment

19. Scientific research (summarised in a 2007 Opinion by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)) shows that enrichment materials for pigs:

- are of great importance in enabling them to engage in their natural behaviours of exploring and manipulating materials
- should be complex, changeable and destructible and that straw is particularly suitable.

20. A proportion of English farmers fail to use one of the natural enrichment materials referred to in the legislation and instead just provide metal chains or toys even though scientific research shows that chains or toys are fundamentally unsatisfactory as enrichment materials. In its 2007 review of the research EFSA stressed that objects such as chains are not sufficient to provide for the behavioural needs of pigs.

21. We believe that Defra must take steps to ensure that farmers provide effective environmental enrichment as required by law.

#### Tail docking

22. A 2007 EFSA report shows that 81% of piglets are tailed docked in the UK. This figure is similar to that given in 2006 by Dr David Burch, then President of the Pig Veterinary Society, who said that “currently over 80% of UK pigs are tail docked as a routine preventive measure”.

23. Research (reviewed by EFSA in 2007)) shows that the majority of tail biting can be prevented by keeping pigs in good conditions: in particular, by giving them straw or some other manipulable material. EFSA also concluded that the use of fully slatted floors is an important factor leading to tail biting.

24. Compassion believes that the fact that 80% of piglets are being tail docked indicates that many farmers are not, in any serious manner, fulfilling the legislation’s requirement to take measures designed to change inadequate environmental conditions or management systems before carrying out tail docking. The considerable body of research that shows how tail biting can be prevented would suggest that, if farmers were making genuine attempts to take other measures to prevent tail biting, a very much lower proportion of piglets than 80% would be tail docked.

25. We believe that Defra must take steps to properly enforce the ban on routine tail docking. Some farms have fully slatted floors; it is difficult to provide straw or other meaningful enrichment materials on such floors. We question whether newly-built fully-slatted systems are compatible with the EU requirement to address environmental issues before resorting to tail docking.

#### **Economic considerations**

26. As indicated earlier, the ban on sow stalls added around just 2 pence to the cost of producing 1 kg of pigmeat. Moreover, a range of studies show that the provision of straw and/or more space for fattening pigs can produce economic benefits in terms of higher growth rates and better feed conversion ratios.

27. British consumers are increasingly demanding high welfare products. The willingness of consumers to pay extra for good welfare has to date been seen primarily in the poultry sector. Defra figures show that in the last ten years UK production of non-cage eggs has doubled from 20.5% in 1998 to 41% in the first quarter of 2008. Free-range eggs now account for over half of the value of egg sales at the retail level. In addition, Sainsbury's reports that higher welfare meat chicken sales are up 60% compared to 2007.

28. Similar developments are likely to take place in the pigmeat sector. Accordingly, British pig farmers should take steps to position themselves as the providers of genuinely high welfare pigmeat. This means that they will have to provide straw and move away from routine tail docking and farrowing crates. Such welfare improvements should be seen not as a burden but as a marketing opportunity.

**What could supermarkets do to help UK pig farmers?**

29. We fully share the pig sector's concerns that certain supermarkets are selling imported pigmeat produced to lower welfare standards than those that obtain in the UK. This practice inevitably undermines UK pig farmers and runs counter to the principles of corporate social responsibility in failing to support farmers who are producing meat to higher welfare standards than many of their competitors.

30. Compassion will continue to lobby supermarkets not to stock imported pigmeat produced to lower welfare standards than UK pigmeat and to apply this principle to all pigmeat whether fresh, frozen or processed, and whether own brand or branded product.

**Public procurement**

31. Compassion believes that the public sector should procure food produced to good standards of animal welfare. Much of the pigmeat used in the public sector is produced to low welfare standards. We believe the public sector should not use imported pigmeat produced to lower welfare standards than those that apply in the UK. Indeed, we believe that the public sector should go further and only buy pigmeat, whether domestic or imported, from pigs that have been provided with straw (or some similar natural material) as bedding, that have not been tail docked and whose mothers have not been kept in extreme confinement systems.

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