

PIG FARMING IN THE EU

Briefing

In 2008 and 2009 Compassion in World Farming (Compassion) conducted an undercover investigation in a large selection of farms across Europe (Germany, Denmark, Hungary, Netherlands, Spain and UK).

Germany and Spain are the EU's biggest pig producers. Between them, the six countries visited produce 57% of the 250 million pigs reared each year in the EU.

The majority of pigs seen during the investigation were being farmed illegally in breach of EU Council Directive 91/630 (as amended in 2001) laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs.¹ The investigation paints a portrait of pig farming practices across the whole EU.

INVESTIGATION'S FINDINGS

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)
Denmark	100%	67%
Germany	79%	89%
Hungary	70%	70%
Netherlands	100%	88%
Spain	100%	100%
UK	54%	36%

¹ The Directive was re-issued in 2008 in a consolidated form by Council Directive 2008/120/EC

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 Warendorf 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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Denmark

Investigators visited 14 farms; ten with growing pigs and eight with breeding sows (some farms had both types of pigs).

- In 100% of Danish farms visited that had growing pigs, a significant number of tail docked pigs were present
- In 67% of Danish farms visited that had growing pigs, there was either no or ineffective environmental enrichment.

Hungary

Investigators were able to record the conditions in 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, 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.

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Netherlands

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

- **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 in 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.

- **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

Investigators were able to document conditions at a total of 11 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.

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.

- **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.**

THE WELFARE OF PIGS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Around 250 million pigs are slaughtered each year in the EU.² 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

² European Commission: Eurostat & DG Agriculture

Fattening pigs

Most fattening pigs in the EU are kept indoors in conditions of utter deprivation – in overcrowded, barren, often dirty sheds. Most 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.

Failure to provide enrichment materials as required by EU legislation

In order to improve pig welfare, the EU Pigs Directive has since 2003 required pigs to be given straw or some similar enrichment material to enable them to engage in their natural behaviours of investigating and manipulating materials. However, most EU farmers ignore this law and either provide no enrichment materials or materials such as chains, toys, tyres or plastic objects that have been shown by scientific research to be ineffective in providing for pigs' behavioural needs.

Failure to end routine tail docking as required by EU legislation



Scientific research shows that in natural conditions pigs are highly active, spending 75% of their day rooting, foraging and exploring.³ Such activities are impossible for factory 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. However, 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, above all to give them straw or some similar material to enable rooting and investigation behaviour. In recognition of this, the Pigs Directive has since 2003 prohibited routine tail docking.

The Directive requires farmers to try to prevent tail biting by improving inadequate conditions. Only when they have done this are they permitted, if they still have a tail biting problem, to tail dock. A scientific report by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) concludes that the major causes of tail biting are lack of straw and a barren environment.⁴ Thus a farmer who does not provide straw or some similarly effective material has not changed "inadequate conditions" and so cannot lawfully tail dock.

However, a 2007 report by EFSA found that over 90% of EU piglets are tail docked despite the ban on routine tail docking.⁵ This report together with Compassion's

³ Stolba A. and Woodgush D.G.M., 1989. The behaviour of pigs in a semi-natural environment. *Animal Protection* **48**: 419-425.

⁴ Scientific Opinion 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, 1-13

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.

investigation indicates that most EU pig farmers are ignoring the law that prohibits routine tail docking.

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

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.



An EU-wide ban on sow stalls will come into force in 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 EFSA has concluded that keeping sows in stalls for the first four weeks of pregnancy is damaging to their health and welfare.⁷

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Compassion believes that the ‘first four weeks’ exception should be removed, i.e. sow stalls should be banned throughout the pregnancy. Sow stalls have already been banned in the UK 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.⁸



⁶ As 5

⁷ 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.

⁸ Weber et al, 2007. Piglet mortality on farms using farrowing systems with or without crates. *Animal Welfare* 16: 277-279.

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.



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