

Meeting of the sub-group on the welfare of pigs

Fifth meeting, 19 September 2022 (Videoconference)

– MINUTES –

Attendance

Independent expert	Anna Valros Anne-Claire Berensten
Civil society organisations	CIWF
Business and professional organisations	COGECA FVE UECBV
Member States	Denmark Germany Italy Sweden
European Commission	DG SANTE G5
Guest	European Reference Centre for the Welfare of pigs & Chair of the EFSA working group for the scientific opinion on the welfare of pigs on farm External contractor for IA study on kept animals

Discussions on space allowances and floors for weaners and rearing pigs

1. Context by the Commission

The Commission presented the context of the discussion, referring in particular, to the requirements of the current legislation and the relevant parts of the Inception Impact Assessment (problems to be addressed and issues to be taken into account).

2. Presentation of EFSA 2022 Scientific opinion on the welfare of pigs on farm, by the chair of the relevant EFSA working group

The chair of the EFSA working group (hereinafter the chair) presented the mandate as well as the outcome of EFSA's work, briefly referring to the 105 conclusions and 71 recommendations therein.

Subgroup members posed questions relevant to the space allowances and floors. Responding to the questions, the chair clarified that different k values provide the base to calculate space allowances for different pig weights. In addition, EFSA 2022 opinion presents the effects of different k values, but there is no recommendation for any of them as regards the total space allowance (a previous EFSA report recommended a specific k value). The recent EFSA report recommends to allow a k value of 0,033 for the animals to be able to lie on.

A discussion took place on the possibility to use temporary confinement of periparturient and lactating sows, for which EFSA concludes a space of 4,3 to 6,3 m² for a duration of at least 7 days (7 to 16) is needed to ensure similar piglet mortality as in existing farrowing crates. Some members find the period of 7 days rather long, arguing that 4 to 5 days can be enough to achieve the objective and that according to other research, there is no difference in piglet mortality between 4 and 7 days of confinement. The chair explained that the range of days is owed to the level of uncertainty.

A member underlined that the duration of confinement but also the management around exiting the confinement are important elements. Also, as many factors have an effect on piglet mortality, training of stock people is essential.

Another member, pointed out that the duration of confinement is influenced by genetics, i.e. some breeds are more active or aggressive and need a longer confinement. The chair clarified that EFSA looked at the space allowance as a single factor, not examining all the influencing factors together.

Finally, it was highlighted that a confinement of 7 days might give some certainty to farmers during the transition to loose farrowing but future research may further decrease the duration of confinement.

3. Presentation by independent expert “Space allowances and floors for weaners and rearing pigs”

The expert proposed to amend the weight categories of pigs in the future EU legislation, noticing that the existing ones are not suitable for pigs over 110kg, e.g. Italian heavy-slaughtered pigs (>150kg), gilts reared for reproduction (120-150kg).

Current thresholds	Proposal
<10	<10
10-20	10-20
20-30	20-30
30-50	30-60
50-85	60-90
85-110	90-120
>110	120-150
	>150

The proposal included the modification of thresholds for the existing categories and the addition of one more category.

As regards space allowances, the expert proposed that the new EU legislation offers more space, according to k values corresponding to pigs’ needs, i.e. resting, thermoregulation, circumnavigation to access resources, maintenance of separate functional areas, exploration and locomotion. The expert is of the opinion that giving space for the last two needs is not economically viable, but a k value of 0,047 should be the minimum to allow pigs lie fully recumbent (separately) and thermoregulate. This value was already recommended in EFSA opinion of 2005. An additional k value of 0,03 would contribute to a certain extent to circumnavigation and maintenance of separate functional areas. This latter suggestion corresponds with space allowances for the provision of functional areas that are recommended in farm planning examples elaborated by the German project ‘Future Farm Concept’.

As discussed during the meeting of the subgroup on tail docking, the expert suggested the future legislation provides a dual k value, borrowing a provision from the Broilers’ Directive (Council Directive 2007/43/EC). This proposal aims to incentivise farmers move away from tail docking. It includes a baseline k value of 0,047 (preferably 0,050) as a minimum requirement for all farms and a derogation with k value of 0,036 only for farms that exhibit good animal welfare (all pigs intact (undocked) and <X% of tail lesions at slaughterhouses). The difference between the baseline k value and k value for the farms with intact tails must be big enough so as to incentivise farmers to stop tail docking.

Concerning floors, the expert elaborated on possible conflicting requirements between the pig behaviour and hygiene of the pen. In summary, the expert suggested the provision of solid floor according to EFSA recommendation (k value of 0,033), possibly with no drainage, while the rest of the pen may be drained. The expert pointed out that if solid floors remain dry, there may be less emissions and easier provision of enrichment. However, the floor should form an integrated system with pen design and climate control

(cooling requirements). Lastly, the expert proposed longer transitional periods for floors than space allowances, especially for existing farms.

4. Discussion

i. Weight categories

Some members consider the proposal on **fixed weight categories** is feasible, while others have doubts, taking into account that the more the weight categories are, the more will be the mixing of pigs. The concern is related to the fattening unit, which would have to be divided in many different parts and pigs would be mixed 2-3 times, a practice having negative effects on pigs' welfare. In addition, it would be difficult to apply the all-in-all-out principal.

Several members argued that anyway pigs are not/should not be mixed. Usually pigs are mixed once between weaning and rearing phase (frequently pigs are sold to other farms). After that, only splitting of groups should occur (taking out the heavier pigs to give more space to the others). Also farmers avoid mixing the pigs, as they lose kilos of production. However, a member reminded that also splitting can be harmful, as every time the group changes, the pig hierarchy has to be re-established.

A member pointed to the possibility that no mixing nor splitting would be necessary if the future legislation sets increased requirements for space allowances, as farms could use two different pen sizes for the rearing phase e.g. for 30-60kg and 60-90kg. A pig group would then be moved from one pen to the other without changing the composition of the group.

A solution was proposed to minimise the number of categories according to the slaughter weight, e.g. having one category between 30-90kg if the slaughter weight is 90kg and two categories 30-90kg and 90-120kg, if the slaughter weight is at 120kg. This solution was disputed by other members.

On the other hand, some members find that fixed categories provide an advantage from the point of view of the competent authority, as the compliance with space requirements is more easily controlled.

Alternatively, Sweden and some other countries use a **formula** to calculate the space needed according to the weight of pigs: *Total area: $0.17 + \text{weight (kg)} / 130$* . The formula is a continuous system giving the advantage of providing the exact space requirement for the exact weight of the pig or the average weight in the pen, given that pigs grow continuously and not in steps.

An interesting option for several members was to use both the **formula for growers and a fixed category for slaughter** pigs between 90-125kg (most common slaughter weight in the EU).

A member emphasised the need to foresee in legislation a feeding space for reasons of avoiding tail biting. This issue is especially important for weaners: if feeding area is limited tail biting may become a serious problem even when there is a large total area. Sweden has a formula that calculates the feeding area: *Feeding space. $0,164 + \text{weight (kg)} / 538$* . Germany, Switzerland and Norway also have requirements for feeding areas.

ii. k values

As regards the proposed k values, some members agreed with an increase and others consider that the proposal of the expert is unrealistic. Several members supported to have a space of at least 1-1,1m² for pigs up to 110kg, while some do not agree with more than 0,77m². A member considers that k value 0,047 is very high, especially in temperatures below 25°C. Several members agreed that the appropriate space allowance is linked to temperature and type of flooring.

Regarding the proposal on dual k value (baseline k 0,047) inspired from the Broilers' Directive, the opinions of members were distinct.

Advantages:

- According to several members, it is a very good idea to set a condition of having a low incidence of tail lesions at the slaughterhouse in order to be able to apply a lower space allowance.
- Others consider that many farmers are qualified risk assessors and can decide how to mitigate risks if they are given the possibility to choose a k value.
- Some members see a positive aspect from the competent authority perspective: if a k value of 0,047 is fixed as a minimum requirement in legislation, however a farmer still tail docks the pigs, there is a legal base to ask the farmer to give more space (one can only give less if one keeps intact pigs).

Disadvantages:

- Linking the provision of lower space allowance with keeping intact pigs would allow farmers with increased space allowances to tail dock. This includes extensive systems with bad management.
- The lower space suggested (k value 0,036) goes below the minimum a pig should have (fully recumbent lying & thermoregulation).
- The approach of 2 k values may be more complicated for pigs than for broilers. For broilers, the house is emptied once or twice and the level of foot pad lesions at the slaughterhouse is calculated when the whole house is empty. However, a pig farm normally is not emptied in one time. In addition, pigs grow slower than broilers. This disadvantage was challenged by other members saying the measure is feasible also for pigs, but the calculation should cover a longer period and not just one batch of pigs. In Finland, there is a plan to subsidize farmers as of next year, if they demonstrate low level of tail lesions at slaughter.

A member proposed instead to fix a baseline k value of 0,036 for all farms that comply with tails' legal requirements but require a higher k value 0,047 for the non-compliant farms i.e. those that cannot raise pigs with intact tails or have a high percentage of tail lesions at slaughter. The option is based on the logic that if other factors are not controlled, then one needs more space. It would be not a premium but a penalty and according to the member, it would be easier controlled. Other members find this approach is not logical as a k value of 0,047 is the minimum pigs need.

Regarding the time of application of the dual k value, several members said it should be in place only on a temporary basis during transitional periods, as the ultimate goal is to stop tail docking (which is already banned). A member can accept this approach also on a permanent basis.

Once a total ban is implemented, the dual k value may be maintained based only on tail lesions at slaughter lesions.

iii.Climate control

Some members proposed to link a lower k value with climate control of the farm. This would mean that farmers may apply a lower space allowance (higher stocking density) under the condition they are controlling the indoor climate. These members also find that the indoor climate is a parameter that can be controlled by the authorities in the context of inspections, through gas concentrations (NH₃, CO₂), temperature and the behaviour of pigs themselves, which exhibit reactions corresponding to the climate. Other members added that climate control is crucial and the legislation should be futureproof in this regard, as the climate is getting warmer and warmer over time.

The use of climate control to allow a decrease in space allowance was challenged by other members saying that such a provision would be hardly controllable, as the sole installation of the climate control system does not guarantee its proper function and in any case, it would be complicated for the authorities to go in a farm and argue if the climate control is sufficient or not. Finally, they find there would be no

added value in requiring climate control per se, as proper environmental conditions could be indirectly demonstrated through intact tails.

Members stated that in EU countries having high temperatures (Spain, Portugal, Italy), there is usually static/natural ventilation. This type of ventilation is considered more sustainable compared to the energy consuming and costly electronic systems. However, although the air can be moved with fans, the indoor temperature does not change if outdoor temperature is high – this is difficult to achieve even in human residences. Cooling systems may be present especially in farrowing units.

Italy introduced legislation through a quality scheme, to provide subsidies for solar panels, in an attempt to modify ventilation systems or air condition systems in existing farming. Italy is of the opinion that it is possible to control climate this way, but this remains to be seen as the measure was recently introduced.

iv. Floors

Some members pointed to the possibility of giving drained floors with a maximum opening of 10% drainage which would help to keep the lying area drained and clean and would be compatible with the provision of straw. The current legal requirements for the openings of slats would not work if straw is provided. The openings would be blocked and would create problems to the slurry system and consequently the air quality. Therefore, the size of openings needs to be amended in the new legislation.

Several members are of the opinion that the lying area should be purely solid, without any openings for drainage. They base this view on the following arguments a) even drained floors would block with bedding comprising of small particles b) drained floors are again slatted floors to a lower level and there is no science to show at which perforation rate the pigs start to perceive a floor is solid. Therefore, from an animal welfare point of view, a purely solid floor should be provided for pigs to be able to lie down in a comfortable way.

Moreover, a member suggested the solid floor should be of an adequate space, capable of safeguarding hygiene in the pens during summer time. In this regards, Sweden has established a formula for the lying area: *Lying area: 0.10 + weight (Kg)/167*. Also, in Sweden, there are farmers decreasing stocking density during summer, to keep a good hygiene level. In order to avoid problems linked with the hygiene when using solid floors, Sweden has established thresholds for manure gas emissions: 10ppm for NH₃ and 0,5ppm for H₂S.

However, a member suggested that a dirty solid floor does not necessarily mean increased NH₃ compared to a slatted floor, as there is less maturation of manure in the underground slurry. Of course, solid floors are more difficult to clean, especially if more space is provided. Also, pigs must be taught where to eat and dung in particular, if liquid feeding is used.

In terms of construction of solid floors, a member underlined the importance of the shape of the solid floor. Arches or slight slopes would help the keeping of the solid floor clean and remove at least urine. There may also be drainage openings on the side of arches.

Another member pointed out that in high temperatures, pigs prefer to sleep on the slatted floor and in low temperatures, they prefer the solid. However in the south of EU, temperatures are not very low even in winter, therefore farms use fully slatted floors.

Given that EFSA recommended a k value of 0,033 for solid area to accommodate lying behaviour, with additional space for more activities, a question was raised whether the dual k value approach proposed under point (3) which includes a k value of 0,036 could accommodate the additional activities. A member replied that a total area of 1m² would respond as a minimum for the category of 100-125 kg pigs and that, this additional space does not have to be slatted, as pigs can live on fully solid floors. Another member sees that floor should be both solid and drained. A member replied that when a k value of 0,036 is used (in the dual k value approach to incentivise farmers to keep undocked pigs), a solid area corresponding to

k=0,033 would leave very small room for slatted area and therefore, a lower k value should be foreseen for the solid area in this case. Denmark requires at least 1/3 solid or drained floor (max 10% openings) for rearing pigs and at least ½ solid or drained for weaner pigs. The rest may be slatted floor.

v. Impacts

Several members believe an increase in space allowances would have **negative impacts** on the EU pig production. A member estimated that a k value of 0,036 to 0,047 will correspond to raising 2 pigs in the space where now 3 pigs are raised, i.e. 1/3 less pigs in the EU (compared with existing k value of 0,028).

A member emphasised the investments that need to be done by farmers, estimating that a farmer would need 40-50% more space to keep the same number of pigs. Apart from the amount of investment, it would be very difficult to get an authorization for increasing the area of the farm by 50%.

Another issue raised was the affordability of measures for consumers, as the meat price is expected to rise.

Some members consider that the economic estimations are only to be done in the frame of the ongoing study of impact assessment. Other members regard the possible rise in cost of production as addressable, if farmers ensure they earn the same income with a lower amount of pigs.

A member elaborated on **positive impacts** of increasing space allowances. The experience comes from an initiative of the German industry, which subsidises farmers applying certain animal welfare requirements, including the provision of more space (around 0,85m² for a 110kg pig). Farmers report better health and better weight gain, therefore better production results in their farms, already with this increase.

5. AOB

A member informed about a program running in Spain and Portugal (and probably also in Germany) for the certification of farmers on animal welfare, on the basis of the Welfare Quality Project, which uses animal welfare indicators to measure animal welfare. The member reported that there is no control of the farms being granted the certification, which sometimes do not respect even the legislation. Certifiers argue that the welfare program was approved by DG SANTE.

6. Summary of meeting and next steps

The next meeting is scheduled for **17.10.2022**, dedicated on **animal based indicators**.

Members were invited to provide to the Commission any data they referred to during the meeting.