

Minutes First Meeting of the pig subgroup of the EU platform on Animal Welfare 26 November 2018, Grange

This was the first meeting of the pig subgroup of the EU platform on animal welfare. The meeting was not public. The pig subgroup aims to contribute to the objectives of the Platform by providing information, recommendations and proposals for practices which help deliver better pig welfare. The role of the platform is to assist the Commission with the development and exchange of coordinated actions on animal welfare.

Prior to the meeting DG Health and Food Safety F2 had asked the subgroup to complete a questionnaire on the use of animal welfare indicators in relation to tail biting on pig farms, collecting data on the extent and incidence of tail biting, and on the investigation of the underlying causes.

Members of the sub-group uploaded their answers to the [Digital Tool](#) of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare. The subgroup members agreed to work on the following action points before the next meeting (27th March 2019).

Measuring tail lesions

1. **Linda Keeling** and **Anna Valros** to draft a scheme for measuring tail lesions (scheme to focus on data which can be collected at slaughterhouses). The following suggestions in relation to this were made during the meeting:
 - Measuring lesions in batches of pigs with intact tail is different from measuring lesions in docked pigs;
 - Certain authorities still think that collecting slaughterhouse data is only for the purpose of food safety so they should be reminded that the purpose of controls and data collection is also for animal welfare¹;
 - There is the possibility of loss of data in slaughterhouses due to the arrangements to ensure food hygiene. For example the worst tail bitten pigs, usually identified at *ante-mortem*, are directed to a different slaughter line to the normal slaughter pigs and the inspection results may be collected separately.

¹ Regulation 854/2004 Annex I section II: action following controls Chapter I: Communication of inspection results 1. The official veterinarian is to record and to evaluate the results of inspection activities. 2. (a) If inspections reveal the presence of any disease or condition that might affect public or animal health, or compromise animal welfare, the official veterinarian is to inform the food business operator. (b) When the problem identified arose during primary production, the official veterinarian is to inform the veterinarian attending the holding of provenance, the food business operator responsible for the holding of provenance (provided that such information would not prejudice subsequent legal proceedings) and, where appropriate, the competent authority responsible for supervising the holding of provenance.

- In some Member States/regions, there may be a different authority responsible for slaughterhouses to the one responsible for welfare on farm. Co-ordination is needed to collect and then act on the data.
 - Training to mitigate against inter-observer variability should be specified. Systems exist which have been tested for inter-observer reliability, e.g. in Finland OV's have to record the occurrence of injured tails on the slaughter line for each producer every month. Every six months they send the information to farmers. Anna Valros pointed out that this system may not have been tested for inter-observer reliability, but the results are made available to the farmers. The Competent Authority (CA) records the incidence on a monthly and annual basis.
 - In relation to scoring intact tails, a tail-bite that causes less pain than docking should not be scored more severely than docked pigs.
 - Where docked pigs' tails are shorter than half a tail, an investigation of the conditions on the farm of origin is warranted, as the Council of Europe Recommendation concerning pigs Article 24 ii. states: "no more than half of the tail should be docked within the first 7 days of life". Short tail docking may indicate poor conditions on farm and it is done to counter the risk of tail biting in pigs which should have been docked to leave half a tail.
 - The subgroup should consider advising the Commission to make a Commission Recommendation concerning such a system for measuring tail biting injuries.
 - Measuring tail injuries at farm level will be discussed further at the next meeting.
2. Christina Nygaard to upload Danish requirements for farmers to collect photographic evidence of injuries to the Digital Tool (to help CA to understand farmers' measuring standards). Denmark plan to present their risk assessment procedures to the TAILS mission and after that Christina Nygaard could upload this to the Digital tool.
3. Matthias Chapman-Rose to upload:
- a. the German farm assessment and documentation of tail and ear lesions (which is an integral component of the German risk assessment of tail biting) and
 - b. the KTBL scoring system for tail/ear lesions from the "KTBL animal welfare indicator – guideline for farmers".

4. Compliance criteria

Members of the subgroup agreed to draft, and circulate for comment, a document on how authorities could instruct official vets to assess risk parameters:

- a. **Elena Nalon** to coordinate how to assess health status as a risk factor for tail biting. Suggestions made during the meeting included:

- Sweden and Finland both have very good systems to support the sector's animal health status (e.g. advisory support from the slaughterhouse in FI and Sweden has a system for building approval, schemes for antibiotic use and early weaning which incentivise top farmers with the best management).
- Studies show a strong correlation between risk of tail biting and lung pathologies detected at post-mortem. Ammonia levels on farm are also correlated with respiratory tract health.
- Condemnations at slaughter are correlated to health status.
- Data on casualties and mortality should be seen against industry benchmarks. Availability of sick pens i.e. prediction of animals that will need a sick pen and pens allocated for this purpose (history of herd). These pens should be better than pens for normal production, e.g. dry bedding provided. Often hospital pens become "collection" pens for unfit animals and euthanasia policy should be checked. OV should check how many animals that should be in a sick pen are not in a sick pen and how many animals that are in a sick pen should be euthanised and have not been.
- Biosecurity highlighted (e.g. sourcing and storage of straw).
- Air quality and stocking density linked to health (although these parameters are checked in their own right, many of the risk parameters are closely linked).
- Danish campaign on sick pens and criteria used for these inspections can be included.

b. Niamh O'Connell on how to assess diet as a risk factor for tail biting.

- Farmers should always be asked if they have worked on diet as a risk factor, e.g. although not compulsory for all farms, in Finland a feeding plan is a required Animal Welfare Measure for farmers who receive certain animal welfare payments.
- Lena Juul Pedersen, EURCAW, there are recommendations in Danish research on which feed products (based on coarseness of feed) are better for pigs to avoid gastric ulcers. This may need to be adapted to make criteria for controls.
- The different kind of diet pigs need during different phases of life need to be presented (balance and content). Intestinal disturbances trigger tail biting, so feed changes need to be smooth and different feeds aligned with each other. Determine the extent of the coarseness of feed so not finely ground. Finely ground may help pigs grow well but causes ulceration.
- Legislative requirement of "feed at least once a day" is too little in practice, as gilts minimum 2 times, fattening pigs 3 times, rearing pigs 5 times a day is industry norm.
- If feed change happened a week or so before tail biting then advise to check feeding regime.
- The density of the diet needs to be linked to the genetics of the pigs.
- Check for stereotypies in gilts/dry sows as it means issue with diet or gastric issues (ulceration). More obvious in these animals than in fattening animals (so can be an

indicator if farm feeding regimes are well managed). Restricted feeding should be done by diluting, as feed restriction in rearing gilts could trigger tail-biting problems. Heat stress in fast growing animals is also a very important (partly diet related) welfare problem.

- Feeders should be full all the time if genuinely *ad lib* feeding and pigs should not have to choose to feed at less preferred times of the day.
 - If long feeding troughs (not *ad lib*) feed still needs to be there for some time (not finished in 15 minutes).
 - "Industry" recommendation for *ad lib* feeding is generally 1 feeding place per 8 pigs but this leads to competition, better to have 5 pigs per feeding place.
 - It is a good practice to have cleaning protocols for the water system due to biofilms. Tests for water quality have to be at least 2 per year. Always test functioning of the drinkers on the spot.
- c. **Emma Baxter** on to how to assess competition for food and space as a risk factor for tail-biting (note some points on diet overlap with competition).
- A high frequency of feeding is advised in Finland and Sweden, but in any case there is a difference between liquid (2-3 times daily) and dry system (*ad lib*). Problem is that pigs want to eat at same time and synchronise together. Different views as to whether pigs do not want to eat during the night or whether in certain climates they prefer to eat at night. Also if pigs learn that food is always available this reduces fighting.
 - (as above in "diet") If trough is empty too fast means weaker animals cannot eat enough. Food must be in trough for at least 15 minutes. Recommend OV to check non *ad lib* systems during feeding time.
 - Possible animal indicators: queueing behaviour, weight variation, injury scores. Tail "tapping" at the feeder is start of tail biting.
 - Finnish recommendation is one water source per 10 pigs and at least 2 sources per pen (as one may break down, or dominant pigs may 'take charge of' one water source, making it difficult for subordinates to get to water). More and more research indicates that water access is very important to avoid tail biting. Water should be available already in the farrowing pens as piglets getting less milk will drink water earlier, rate of water flow also a factor. Consistency in type of drinkers used throughout pigs' lifespan should be assessed.
 - Opportunities to escape and hide from other pigs. In Sweden typical pen design has a barrier separating the dunging area and functions as a barrier hide. Several comments that barriers may not allow escape and result in pigs getting cornered. Prefer to give more space than give more corners.
 - The number of times there is mixing of pigs, e.g. based on weight of animals.

EFSA 2012 formula results in much more space than Directive. Suggestion is that you need to give pigs more space than minimum requirement in Directive. Space allowance has direct financial implications, but authorities should consider imposing higher allowances on farms with continuing tail biting problems.

5. Knowledge transfer

Sarah Ison's study of pig farmers in the US shows they obtain information mostly by word of mouth from vets, other farmers and extension teams. Specialist magazines and finally the internet are further down the list of information sources. The move to intact tails is a massive shift for producers and fear of financial risk together with uncertainty are major obstacles to change.

Inger Anneberg discussed resistance/barriers to change and the need to consider why people don't do what they are asked to do. Such resistance/barriers need to be taken seriously and in a scientific way, e.g. use of qualitative interviews. Staff working on a pig farm need more than simple commands for individual tasks and should understand the whole system.

Anna Valros pointed out that farmers' knowledge could be used more, also to understand possible barriers for change in practise. Interesting to note that motivation for not docking in Finland (it causes unnecessary pain, and increased risk of infection) is very similar to the motivation for docking in the UK (it prevents unnecessary pain, and increased risk of infection).

6. Support to ensure rearing of pigs with intact tails

The systems which support rearing pigs with intact tails in Finland and Sweden included:

1. Swedish system of pre-approval of buildings; which is currently being reviewed. Also Finnish building code requirements, as it is much easier to get the system right when the farm is built, and discuss with the farmer to explain rationale for compliance.
2. Feedback, and advice, based on data from slaughterhouses to fine tune management.
3. The farmer manages the risk of tail biting on a day to day basis.

7. Other issues

Tree analysis, presented by **Linda Keeling**, good potential as a management tool, e.g. allows advisor to discuss stockperson/pig ratio based on objective data.

The EU reference centre for Animal Welfare (EURCAW) started work in October and will officially start in January 2019. Although the focus is on Official Controls, 2nd readers, in particular farmers, will also be kept in mind as it is important they know the standards which are being recommended. EURCAW has identified certain national networks to work with FI, IT, FR, LV, SE, PL, RO, EL and will also network with other EU reference centre(s), whenever

these are set up. EURCAW will assess CA needs between October and December 2018 and maintain dialogue with the subgroup. They can be contacted at: INFO.PIGS@EURCAW.EU

Suggestions for EURCAW to consider included:

- Data collection from slaughterhouses for prioritising animal welfare inspections/ risk assessment of farms.
 - Official controls sometimes lack focus on increasing mortality due to increased production, decision making related to on farm killing, link to inspection of sick pens.
 - EURCAW work with farmer "support bodies" which are also supports for official controls. Advisory staff have the most frequent direct contact with farmers. Authorities responsible for approval of construction of farms.
 - Education of farmers so animal welfare mainstreamed into production procedures. Raise awareness of monitoring tail biting, as farmers not used to this will see improved standards.
 - Farm vets also a major "support body" for farmers.
 - Farmers themselves should be asked to give comments on the output from the EURCAW.
 - Subsidy systems to support better animal welfare.
 - Equipment manufacturers e.g. Big Dutchman have recently produced automated straw distribution system.
 - Enforcement procedure to reduce stocking density if tail biting too high.
8. No member of the subgroup objected to members of the platform having access to the documents uploaded to the section of the Digital Tool dedicated to the pig sub-group.
9. Commission to ask Member States to publish their action plans.
10. The Co-ordinator of the subgroup will be Karin Olson.

Next Meeting

The second meeting of the pig sub-group is scheduled for Wednesday 27th March 2019.

List of Participants

European Commission: DG Health and Food Safety: Vasco Antunes, Patrick Caruana, Terence Cassidy, Desmond Maguire, Ignacio Carro Perez, Lorna Scott.

Member States: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Business and Professional Organisations: Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations (COPA), Liaison Centre for the Meat Processing, Industry in the European Union (CLITRAVI), European Meat Network (EMN), Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives (COGECA), International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE)

Civil Society Organisations: Compassion in World Farming, Compassion in World Farming (CIWF)

Independent Experts: Anna Valros, Linda Keeling, Niamh O'Connell

Invited Experts: Johannes Vugts, HK Scan

Observers: Elena Nalon, Eurogroup for Animals, European Union Reference Centre for Animal Welfare