

NEWS RELEASE



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Undercover investigation reveals state of Europe's pigs

Europe's pigs are being farmed in horrendous and often illegal conditions according to a new investigation revealed today, Friday 5 December, by farm animal welfare group Compassion in World Farming.

Conducting an undercover investigation in farms across Europe investigators found poor welfare prevalent in virtually all farms visited. Most of the sows – the mother pigs – that were seen were kept in stalls so narrow that they cannot even turn round. Most fattening pigs are packed into overcrowded barren, often dirty pens.

The study recorded a high rate of poor animal welfare:

- Up to 100 per cent of visits found routine tail docking – prohibited by EU law
- Widespread lack of environmental enrichment – prohibited by EU law
- Continued use of confinement systems for pregnant and mothering sows – currently allowed by EU law

“In general the situation of the pigs was very alike in all countries we visited,” explains Compassion in World Farming’s undercover 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. It’s horrifying to imagine that most of the meat sold in the supermarkets, restaurants and that we see in daily life is being kept in these conditions.”

Chief Policy Advisor for Compassion in World Farming, Peter Stevenson said; “Our investigation illustrates the effects of an industrial system on a highly sentient, intelligent animal. Most pigs in the EU suffer greatly in the harsh world of factory farming.”

The six month long study was conducted on an unprecedented scale to expose conditions across Europe. Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom all came under scrutiny and provide a snapshot of pig farming across the continent.

Compassion in World Farming call on the European Commission to enforce the EU law that requires pigs to be given enrichment materials such as straw and that bans routine tail docking. We also want the law to be strengthened to end the suffering that is inflicted every day on these lively intelligent animals,”.

Pig welfare and EU legislation

Tail docking and environmental enrichment: Tail docking (cutting off the piglets’ tails) is carried out to prevent pigs biting each other’s tails. Routine tail docking is prohibited by EU legislation yet the investigation found the practice to be widespread – up to 100 per cent in some countries. A 2007 European Food Safety Authority report also found that over 90 per cent of EU piglets are tail docked. Tail biting occurs because the pigs are bored and frustrated in their bare, sometimes slatted floored pens and chew and bite each other’s tails.

Environmental enrichment such as straw would drastically reduce or prevent tail biting and so stop the practice of routine tail docking. Under EU law this must be provided yet the investigation found enrichment materials to be lacking in the vast majority of farms visited. Under EU law the enrichment should consist of straw or some other natural material that enables pigs to engage in their natural behaviours of rooting, foraging and exploring.

Sow stalls and farrowing crates: Sow stalls will be illegal across the EU from 2013 after the first four weeks of pregnancy (already banned in Sweden and the UK for the entire duration of pregnancy) yet the investigation found the continued use of sow stalls. Most pregnant sows are confined to sow stalls – metal-barred stalls so narrow the sow

cannot even turn around for one pregnancy after another. When the sow is due to give birth she is moved to a farrowing crate – equally narrow and restrictive. In natural conditions a sow would build a nest of grass, twigs, leaves and branches; instead in the crate she can barely move, lie down or mother her piglets properly. The sow is kept in the crate until her piglets are weaned at three to four weeks and she is re-impregnated and put back in a sow stall.

Challenge to the EU

In 2009 the EU will review its Pig Directive. Compassion in World Farming and OTOZ Animals are calling for the following changes:

- 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
- A ban on farrowing crates
- A ban on painful mutilations – tooth clipping and castration
- The enforcement of the existing ban on tail docking
- The requirement for environment enrichment improved and enforced to ensure all pigs have straw for foraging and bedding and a ban on fully slatted floors
- Enhanced space allowance for fattening pigs

Notes for Editors

Compassion in World Farming

Established in the UK in 1967 by a dairy farmer Compassion in World Farming campaigns in the UK, across the EU and worldwide for better conditions for animals farmed for food. Visit ciwf.org for more information.

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