GROUP HOUSING OF SOWS IN EUROPE: LOOKING FOR STRATEGIES TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE

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EAAP
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Since the 1960's

Easy management

Individual monitoring of health

Controlled feed intake

Reduce occurrence of aggressions
CHRONIC HUNGER

SOCIAL STRESS (unresolved conflicts)

RESTRICTED MOVEMENT
Injuries
Diseases
Death

Stress response
Abnormal behaviour
Stereotypies

ADAPTATION possible

WITH COST

No adaptation

Optimum Welfare

Broom & Johnson, 1993
FRUSTRATION

ATTEMPTS TO ADAPT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

DISFUNCTION OF THE CNS

STEREOTYPIES
“sows must be kept in groups from four weeks after service to one week before the expected time of farrowing”
Member States have had 12 years to ensure a smooth transition to the new system

- Proposal from the Commission
- 1994: EU revealing that gestations crates will be banned
- 2003: new facilities with gestation crates are banned
- 2006: tied sows are illegal
- 2013: gestation crates are illegal
SUCCESS OF GROUP HOUSING

- **Job satisfaction**

  Very few farmers are unsatisfied with the group housing system they are using.

- **Performance**

  - Scratches
  - Vulva biting
  - Ulcers on Shoulders / back
  - Lameness
  - Disease incidence
  - Body condition
  - Reproductive performance

GROUP HOUSING

STALLS
Member States have had 12 years to ensure a smooth transition to the new system.

However, so far, several Member States have failed to adequately comply with the EU law.
Many farmers started the transition too late and will have difficulties meeting the new legal requirements.

November 2011:
only 47% of pig farms in Spain housed pregnant sows in groups
only 16% of farms with less than 400 sows kept the sows in groups

ESTIMATION

Around 40%-50% of pig farms will:
- go into finishing
- sell out to big companies
- just simply going out of pigs
The commission, via a letter of formal notice, called several Member States to take action to address deficiencies in the implementation of the EU legislation.
Member States have had 12 years to ensure a smooth transition to the new system.

However, so far, several Member States have failed to adequately comply with the EU law.

WHY???
Delayed compliance: WHY ???

- COST + CONFLICT WITH OTHER LEGISLATIONS
- LACK OF KNOWLEDGE
Delayed compliance: WHY ???

COST + CONFLICT WITH OTHER LEGISLATIONS

- Uncertainty about the future of the farm
- Amortization gestation crate: 8-9 years. Mortgage of the current pig unit and lack of finances.
- More space per sow: 10-15% less animals
Delayed compliance: WHY ???

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Lack of familiarity with options available for group housing

Lack of expertise to manage group-housed sows effectively

Difficulties in interpretation of the regulation
One of the most common group housing systems in many EU countries is

Close resemblance with the individual gestating stalls.
Delayed compliance: WHY ???

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Lack of familiarity with options available for group housing

Lack of expertise to manage group-housed sows effectively

Difficulties in interpretation of the regulation
Screening information to detect any problematic sows

ADAPTATION TO THE SYSTEM: TRAINING OF GILTS
AGGRESSIONS

Fear
Stress
Health problems

MIXING ANIMALS

COMPETITION FOR RESOURCES

FOR RESOURCES

FOR RESOURCES
Delayed compliance: WHY ???

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

- Lack of familiarity with options available for group housing
- Lack of expertise to manage group-housed sows effectively
- Difficulties in interpretation of the regulation
“THE PIG DIRECTIVE”
2008

**SPACE & FLOOR**

- 2.25 m²/sow including 1.3 m² continuous solid floor
- Max of 15% openings for drainage

**ENRICHMENT & BULKY FOOD**

- Groups <6 or >40 need 10% more or less space
- Manipulable material and high-fibre food

**MINIMIZE AGGRESSION**

- Access to the food - feeding system
• Transition from gilt to sow

• Protection of restricted fed sows

• **Definition of “continuous” solid floor**

• Keeping groups together with variation in AI date

• **Definition of fibrous feed and enrichment**

• **Minimum space behind free access stalls**
“...at least 0.95 m² per gilt and 1.3 m² per sow, must be of continuous solid floor of which a maximum of 15% is reserved for drainage openings”

Some Member States have specific interpretations

- The Netherlands:
  1.3 m² solid floor per sow should be in one surface and not split up in pieces
  Maximum 5% openings

- Denmark:
  Maximum 10% openings

The EU maximum of 15% openings is close to the proportion openings in standard slatted floors
“...permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities, such as straw, hay, wood, sawdust, mushroom compost ...”

Are those materials equally effective?
An appropriate enrichment material can be defined as a material which stimulates exploratory behaviour for an extended length of time, preferably comparable to the level of occupation provided by straw.
“...a sufficient quantity of **bulky or high-fibre food** as well as **high-energy food.**”

The majority of EU-sows doesn’t have any long fibres available.
“...the total unobstructed floor area available must be at least 1.64m²/gilt and 2.25m²/sow.”

EXAMPLE OF TYPICAL FAS SYSTEM

Minimum width of the area behind the stalls:
- expression of social behaviour
- movement

At least 1.5 times the body length of 2m
Delayed compliance: WHY ???

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

- Lack of familiarity with options available for group housing
- Lack of expertise to manage group-housed sows effectively
- Difficulties in interpretation of the regulation

How to deal with those difficulties?
Develop effective and meaningful knowledge transfer strategies

- Guidance to authorities and stockpersons
- Consistent information across countries and across people from different backgrounds

Supporting structure to provide information for a better implementation
COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

- Bring people from different regions/backgrounds together
- Identify specific conflictive areas
- Use different strategies to transfer knowledge

EU WelNet
Coordinated European Animal Welfare Network

www.euwelnet.eu
“BROILER DIRECTIVE”

“PIG DIRECTIVE”

Growing pigs: enrichment material and tail docking requirements

Group housing of sows

“KILLING REGULATION”

DEVELOP AND EVALUATE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER STRATEGIES
TOOLS TESTED TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE

FACT SHEETS

DIGITAL MATERIAL

TRAINING ACTIVITIES WITH GROUPS OF FARMERS

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING MATERIAL
TOOLS TESTED TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE

FACT SHEETS

DIGITAL MATERIAL

TRAINING ACTIVITIES WITH GROUPS OF FARMERS

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING MATERIAL
TOOLS TESTED TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE

FACT SHEETS

- Normal behaviour
- Main group housing systems
- Managing social behaviour
- Training and supervision
- Assessment of compliance

ADVISORY BOARD

PRODUCERS

COMPETENT AUTHORITIES
TOOLS TESTED TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE

FACT SHEETS

DIGITAL MATERIAL

TRAINING ACTIVITIES WITH GROUPS OF FARMERS

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING MATERIAL
TOOLS TESTED TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE

DIGITAL MATERIAL

POWER POINT PRESENTATIONS

SHORT VIDEOS OF FARMERS
TOOLS TESTED TO TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE

FACT SHEETS

DIGITAL MATERIAL

TRAINING ACTIVITIES WITH GROUPS OF FARMERS

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING MATERIAL

Promote discussion between farmers with different background and experiences

Contact and direct intervention

QUESTIONNAIRES
Before and after training
MERCI POUR VOTRE ATTENTION !

Bryan Jones
Valérie Courboulay
Marie-Christine Meunier-Salaün
Herman Vermeer
Michael Mendl
Claire Weeks
Lisanne Stadig
Frank Tuyttens
Jacek Pawel Nowicki