

NPA BRIEFING



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NPA briefing note on piglet euthanasia

Issue:

At times it is necessary to humanely kill a pig on farm. For piglets this may be done by applying swift external trauma to the head. While this method may seem like an act of cruelty to the general public, it is in fact an effective and appropriate way of humanely killing a piglet to prevent it suffering further from pain or illness.

Background:

- Under the [Animal Welfare Act \(2006\)](#) it is a legal offence to cause unnecessary suffering to an animal. **Failing to prevent an animal's suffering is also an offence.**
- When a pig becomes sick or injured, it is the responsibility of the pig farmer to ensure that the animal does not suffer unnecessarily.
- Depending on the injury or illness, there are a number of options for handling a sick pig:
 - Movement to a hospital pen
 - Treatment
 - Casualty slaughter at an abattoir
 - Euthanasia (humane killing) on farm
- The Pig Veterinary Society has published "[The Casualty Pig](#)" - guidelines outlining the factors and considerations involved in deciding which course of action to take. This useful guide for pig producers also details the appropriate methods for humane euthanasia of pigs.
- Because euthanasia on farm is often done in an emergency, it is not always possible to wait for the farm's veterinary surgeon to get to the unit to perform the humane killing. Therefore, pig farmers often need to carry it out themselves.
- On Red Tractor Assured farms, any person who will carry out pig euthanasia must be trained in the appropriate methods and assessed for competence by their veterinary surgeon.
- In addition, a requirement of Red Tractor Assurance standards, which 92% of British pigs are produced under, is that each farm site must have a documented Work Instruction for euthanasia detailing the
 - methods that can be used for each age class of pigs,
 - names of the competent persons,
 - checks/actions to ensure that pig welfare is protected during euthanasia.
- The [Humane Slaughter Association](#) lists the recommended emergency killing methods for various livestock species. For pigs, stunning by captive-bolt is recommended, followed immediately by bleeding or pithing. Shotguns, humane killers, rifles, or lethal injection may also be used.
- For piglets (under 4 weeks of age or 5kg), the same methods apply, however external trauma may also be used, immediately followed by bleeding. This involves a heavy blow to the head (either against a solid surface or using a blunt instrument).

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- It is essential that the blow is administered swiftly, firmly and with absolute determination. The intention must be to cause immediate loss of consciousness.
- This method is not appropriate for pigs older than 4 weeks of age or weighing more than 5kg.
- [EU legislation \(1099/2009\)](#) states that external trauma may not be used routinely as a method of euthanasia, but only where there are no other methods available for stunning.
- While lethal injection may seem preferable, farmers are not permitted to administer the drug and so have to arrange for a vet to do it. If a vet cannot get to the farm immediately, it may be necessary to use an alternative method to avoid prolonging the pig's suffering.

NPA position:

- NPA agrees with the Pig Veterinary Society view that when a pig becomes sick or injured, which inevitably happens from time to time, the farmer should base his/her decision about its treatment on animal welfare and public health considerations, not economics.
- The pig's welfare should always be the first consideration. While applying trauma to a piglet's head may seem cruel from the human perspective, it is known to be a humane method of killing young pigs.
- The British pig industry is committed to ensuring that staff involved in the care of pigs are fully trained and competent in the key tasks involved in pig production. Anybody wishing to arrange training in emergency euthanasia should contact [AHDB Pork](#).

END