

# NPA BRIEFING



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## NPA briefing note on welfare in the British pig industry

The National Pig Association believes that the British pig industry is a world leader in pig welfare and the note below sets out exactly why.

1. In England, around 40% of sows are kept outdoors for the entirety of their adult lives. Most of the remainder are housed indoors in groups on straw with only 2% kept on fully slatted floors<sup>[1]</sup>. This contrasts greatly with other European pig producing countries where the vast majority of sows are housed indoors and on fully or part-slatted floors with little or no bedding.
2. Whilst outdoor sow production has always been a feature of British pig production, farmers moved towards loose housing of indoor sows in 1999, when gestation stalls were totally banned in this country. Gestation stalls, which are traditionally used to house sows individually in close-confinement for the duration of their pregnancy, were only partially banned in the European Union in 2013, fourteen years later<sup>[2]</sup>. As of October 2015, six EU countries had yet to demonstrate compliance with the legislation on sow stalls, almost 3 years after the ban came into force.
3. While gestation stalls are completely banned in Britain, other countries in the EU may keep sows in them for up to 4 weeks after mating.
4. That 40% of British sows are housed outdoors also means that 40% of piglet litters are farrowed freely (i.e. not born in farrowing crates, which are still permitted in Britain and the EU). Very few piglets are born in free farrowing systems outside of the UK.
5. It is estimated that the majority (60%) of finisher pigs in England are housed in straw-based systems, with 25% on fully slatted flooring and 10% on partially slatted floor<sup>[1]</sup>. Again, this contrasts heavily with most other countries where finisher pigs are usually kept on slats.
6. Over 90% of British pigs are reared on farms that take part in the Red Tractor assurance scheme and over 30% of pigs are also raised under the RSPCA Assured scheme which focusses primarily on welfare standards. Although other countries do have assurance schemes, none of them are audited to the same degree or to the same standard as Red Tractor.
7. Farms that achieve the Red Tractor standard meet and exceed the requirements outlined in national and EU legislation for pig keeping. The scheme also ensures complete farm to fork traceability and a robust auditing system.
8. Red Tractor farms must be visited 4 times per year by a vet and once per year by an independent auditor who checks that the farm is complying with the [standards of the scheme](#). Those that do not comply are removed from the scheme.
9. Red Tractor assurance goes further than legislative requirements in several areas. For example, farms in the scheme must have a Veterinary Health Plan detailing how the health and welfare of the pigs is to be managed and improved. This includes action plans for reducing tail docking and

monitoring teeth clipping and medicine use. The plan must be reviewed quarterly by the vet and the farmer.

10. Another example of how Red Tractor standards go over and above minimum legislative requirements is that assured units must participate in the [Real Welfare](#) scheme, an industry pioneered method of assessing animal welfare, rather than the environment. This involves veterinary assessment of finisher pig welfare using a set of five 'welfare outcomes', which are animal-based indicators of compromised welfare, such as lameness and tail lesions.
11. Measuring presence of these welfare indicators enables farmers to identify and rectify any problems, if there are any. Farmers can also use the results of these welfare assessments to benchmark themselves against how other farms are performing, which stimulates constant improvements in welfare.
12. Piglet castration is legal in the European Union. A recent survey by the Federation of Veterinarians in Europe (FVE) revealed that surgical castration of male piglets is still common practice in most EU countries and is often done without any anaesthetic or pain relief <sup>[3]</sup>. For example, in Denmark more than 90% of male piglets are castrated <sup>[4]</sup>. In the UK, castration is prohibited on Red Tractor assured farms and therefore extremely uncommon.
13. Representatives from pig industries across the EU have signed a voluntary commitment to end piglet castration <sup>[5]</sup>, but not until 2018 and the evidence so far suggests that they will not meet this target <sup>[3]</sup>.
14. A key factor in achieving good pig welfare is having well-trained staff. Staff working on British pig farms are highly professional and continually strive to enhance their skills in pig husbandry. More than 500 people working in the British pig industry are currently signed up to the [Pig Industry Professional Register](#), a scheme instigated by the industry to document and encourage continuous professional development.
15. In addition, Red Tractor standards require that certain tasks which may affect pig welfare, such as giving injections, are only performed by staff that have been properly trained and deemed by a vet to be competent to carry out the procedure.
16. Consideration of pig welfare does not end at the farm gate; it is important to ensure a high standard of welfare is achieved up to the point of slaughter. Anyone transporting pigs on a journey that is over 65km is required by EU legislation to obtain a Certificate of Competence by demonstrating that they have expertise in protecting animal welfare during transport <sup>[6]</sup>.
17. The Red Tractor scheme also assures standards during transport and at abattoirs, therefore ensuring the welfare of the animals is monitored throughout the entire supply chain to achieve the same high standards at all stages.
18. A survey undertaken by Food Standards Agency inspectors in 2013 found that 96% of red meat slaughterhouses in Britain have good standards of animal welfare. In addition, 43% of red meat slaughterhouses have some form of CCTV in use for animal welfare purposes <sup>[7]</sup>.
19. The [Pig Health and Welfare Council](#), which was set up by the British pig industry in 2004, has recently established a dedicated panel of experts in pig welfare to drive further improvements in the welfare of British pigs.
20. A number of the leading UK supermarkets work closely with the farmers that supply their pork to research and develop innovative ways of enhancing pig welfare. The high level of interest paid to animal welfare by UK supermarkets is not seen in many other countries.
21. British pig farmers are committed to ensure that the welfare of the pigs they rear remains paramount. Whilst commitment from the retailers is crucial, consumers must also accept that higher welfare does mean higher cost and therefore must be prepared to pay for British pork if the pig industry is to continue to thrive.

### References

- <sup>[1]</sup> National Statistics from Defra Pig and Poultry Farm Practices Surveys 2009 – England
- <sup>[2]</sup> Council Directive [2008/120/EC](#) laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs
- <sup>[3]</sup> [https://www.pig333.com/3tres3\\_common/art/pig333/11252/fixers/002\\_short\\_report\\_pig\\_castration\\_fin\\_al.pdf](https://www.pig333.com/3tres3_common/art/pig333/11252/fixers/002_short_report_pig_castration_fin_al.pdf)
- <sup>[4]</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_food-safety/information\\_sources/docs/ahw/20150226\\_ahw\\_pig-castration\\_pres\\_1\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_food-safety/information_sources/docs/ahw/20150226_ahw_pig-castration_pres_1_en.pdf)
- <sup>[5]</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare/practice/farm/pigs/castration\\_alternatives/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare/practice/farm/pigs/castration_alternatives/index_en.htm)
- <sup>[6]</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32005R0001&from=en> 6
- <sup>[7]</sup> <http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2013-animal-welfare-survey.pdf>

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