

NPA BRIEFING



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NPA briefing note on tooth reduction (clipping/grinding)

Issue:

The practice of clipping or grinding piglet teeth is frequently used by animal welfare organisations as an example of poor animal welfare associated with intensive pig production.

Background:

- Piglets are born with very sharp needle teeth in the corners of their mouths. During suckling, these teeth can cause severe damage to the sow's udders and cuts to the faces of other piglets in the fight to access the best teats.
- Farmers may be advised by their vet to practice tooth reduction in piglets – the removal of the tips of four needle teeth by clipping (with clippers) or grinding (with a rotating grindstone).
- Clipping and grinding can cause welfare problems. For example, there may be some pain and stress involved in the actual procedure and there may be some chronic pain in the long-term if the tooth or gum is damaged.
- Tooth reduction is permitted under EU Council Directive 2008/120/EC, however practicing it routinely is illegal.
- 92% of pigs produced in the UK are from units that are members of Red Tractor Farm Assurance, meaning they must adhere to additional requirements regarding teeth reduction:
 - Evidence of facial scarring, udder damage and discomfort while suckling must be documented,
 - Need for the procedure must be reviewed quarterly through a farmer-vet discussion and recommendations recorded in the Veterinary Health Plan,
 - Must be carried out before piglets are 72 hours old,
 - Decision to clip or grind teeth must be made at batch or individual litter level.

NPA position:

- In certain cases, piglet and sow welfare may be compromised more by leaving the sharp teeth intact than by blunting the tips. NPA believes that the decision to clip or grind should remain with the farm manager and vet.
- The NPA would not welcome a total ban on tooth reduction, because it should be available for use on specific litters if needed.
- Methods of avoiding any stress or pain that may be involved in the procedure, such as use of analgesics and anaesthetics, should be explored.
- The severity of the welfare problems of tooth clipping and grinding can be reduced through skilled operation of well-maintained clippers/grinders. Stockpersons are trained to clip or grind only the tip of the needle teeth and not down to the gum, to avoid damage to the pulp cavity.