

SUMMARY REPORT

FVE SURVEY ON PIG CASTRATION

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) carried out in November 2015 a survey on pig castration in order to see the progress made in respect to the European declaration on pig castration¹. The end goal of this declaration is to **phase out the surgical castration of pigs by 2018**. The declaration also requests that **since 1 January 2012, surgical castration of pigs shall only be performed with prolonged analgesia and/or anaesthesia**.

In total, 25² countries participated in the survey that was performed with the support of the FVE member organizations.



1. Phasing out surgical castration by 2018

Data on the percentage of castrated male pigs versus non-castrated ones were collected from the different countries. The results showed that in most countries male pigs are still being surgically castrated. Only in Ireland, UK and Spain, less than 20% of pigs are castrated. This has been traditionally the case for those three countries as they slaughter at lower slaughter weight. Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands reported castrating between 20% to 80% of male pigs. In these 4 countries, the number of entire males has gone up significantly. Raising entire males was also reported to be increased, although to a smaller degree, in Austria, Czech, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Portugal and Switzerland. The other countries reported almost no change in the number of male pigs being castrated.

¹ European declaration on pig castration:

² Austria, Belgium, Czech, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK



The European declaration requests to phase out surgical castration by 2018. However, our survey showed that few countries have an official deadline to meet this goal such as Germany.

2. Use of prolonged analgesia and/or anaesthesia when performing surgical castrating.

Since 1 January 2012, surgical castration of pigs shall only be performed with prolonged analgesia and/or anaesthesia. In our survey, we tried to analyse how this requirement is put into practice.

Castration method

Our aim was to find data on which method of castration (with or without analgesia/anaesthesia, immunocastration, etc) is being currently practiced in the different countries. As no absolute data are kept on this issue, our organisations were only able to give us rough data (calculated guesses).

The replies indicated that the number of male pigs castrated with the use of ***anaesthesia and analgesia*** has increased in recent years, however, it is used widely only in a small number of countries, such as Norway, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Castration with ***analgesia*** has become widely used in many countries in recent years. This is most likely to be due to the European and National attention to the welfare issues surrounding pig castration. Respondents from 9 countries³ indicated that analgesia is used in their country in more than 50% of the cases.

Castration ***without any pain relief*** was declared to be still common in 6⁴ countries. In these countries more than 50 % of male pigs are still castrated without any anaesthesia or analgesia. This is in violation of the European declaration that requires anaesthesia and/or analgesia should be used after 1 January 2012.

Immunocastration, licensed since 2009 in Europe, is hardly used in most of the countries. Belgium is the one of the only countries that uses more immunocastration at the moment, while Sweden, Slovakia, Spain and Norway report that they use this method, but in low numbers.



Availability of analgesics and anaesthetics for pigs

³ Austria, Czech, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg and Sweden

⁴ Belgium, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Netherlands,



FEDERATION OF VETERINARIANS OF EUROPE

It is well known that **few anaesthetics or analgesics are licensed** for use in piglets. We collected an overview of products licensed for analgesia and anaesthesia in pigs in the different countries. The most used active substances are meloxicam, ketamine, azaperone, flunixin and lignocaine. Most of these products are only analgesics. The Netherlands and Switzerland are the only countries to use gaseous anaesthesia. Veterinary practitioners often use combinations (eg azaperone with ketamine) but these protocols seem to differ from country to country.

Many responders replied that while analgesia alone is easy and practical to perform, it is insufficient to avoid piglet stress and pain association with surgical castration. Although combined use of an anaesthetic and analgesic appears to be the most effective method for controlling pain, associated with surgical castration, the lack of authorized veterinary medicines, lack of agreed protocols, the extra time involved and cost remain major obstacles to practical application.

In respect to who can administer anaesthesia/analgesia, our survey showed that in most countries only veterinarians are allowed to administer anaesthesia/analgesia, but in some countries a farmer is also allowed to administer these products; such as in the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UK (even while they don't castrate) and Luxembourg. In Denmark and France veterinarians can prescribe analgesia for farmers, who are allowed to administer it, but the anaesthetic must be administered by a veterinarian.

3. Welfare and economic impact

Respondents thought that following the European Declaration this would result in positive welfare benefits, although with minor to serious extra costs.

The main obstacles identified were the extra time and cost needed to castrate the piglets, lack of acceptance of slaughterhouses of entire pigs, boar taint in meat and the need to improve market acceptance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. The deadline of 1 January 2012 has not been met. We are still far from all castrated piglets being treated with prolonged analgesia and/or anaesthesia, while the applied methods are not mutually recognized. Analgesia alone is used in many countries, but this does not alleviate sufficiently the pain and stress involved with piglet castration. Commonly agreed and effective protocols should be developed. Immunocastration, as one of the most animal-welfare-relevant method should be taken seriously considered.
2. The European Declaration was signed in 2010 with the aim to abandon surgical castration by 1 January 2018. We are now two years before the due date and far from the aimed goal. In order to phase out surgical pig castration by 2018, this should now become a top priority of all those involved.
3. Market prices for pig meat have been declining in the last few years due to a multitude of factors such as the Russian import ban and African Swine Fever. It is uncertain if new export market opportunities will arise. Customers in Europe will continue to get more critical towards the ways of production and continue to ask for pork produced more sustainably, more extensively, with pigs enjoying greater welfare protection. Some producers have reacted with changing production style, in combination with some decent marketing, in order to satisfy these more critical customers, providing them with more sustainable pork for a higher price. However, others have opted to continue without changing their protocols, with consequently difficulties to stay profitable. Given the current economic climate, it is unlikely that traditional pig farmers will opt for following the European declaration on pig castration unless it becomes mandatory in one way or another. A more sustainable method to farm pigs has to be found, both from the perspective of the animals and the farmers, in order that farmers can raise pigs in a sustainable and welfare friendly way and to get a fair price for the meat produced. Taking away the pain and stress associated with pig castration is in this way connected to the future of the European pig sector.

