

European Declaration on alternatives to surgical castration of pigs

On the invitation of the European Commission and the Belgian Presidency and following a workshop on alternatives for pig castration, representatives of European farmers, meat industry, retailers, scientists, veterinarians and animal welfare NGOs met in Brussels to discuss the issue of pig castration and its possible alternatives, and to consider the possibilities to end this practice. The working group met on 2 September, 13 October and 19 November 2010.

Surgical castration of pigs is an animal welfare concern. It has been scientifically proven, using physiological and ethological parameters, that surgical castration is a painful intervention even when performed on very young animals. Castration is practiced to avoid the development of undesirable sexual or aggressive behaviour, and to avoid the development of boar taint, since the expected taste and odour of pig meat is a very important aspect that consumers take into account when buying pork. Castration is not a producer's decision but a market driven choice. Castration always has an impact on the type, quality and quantity of meat and fat. On the other hand, non surgical castration has a positive impact on feed conversion and consequently, on the environment.

Different alternatives to surgical castration are already being applied in and outside the EU such as rearing of entire males or vaccination to reduce boar taint. In some countries castration is carried out with analgesia and/or anaesthesia in order to relieve pain. Several countries have already committed themselves to the long term phasing out of surgical castration of pigs. Some European retailers source pig meat from entire males, vaccinated male pigs or pigs which were surgically castrated with anaesthesia or analgesia. Since different approaches within the European Union could create problems for the functioning of the Internal Market and also for exports to third countries, a European wide approach and mutual recognition will facilitate trade in pig meat.

As a first step, from 1 January 2012, surgical castration of pigs, if carried out, shall be performed with prolonged analgesia and/or anaesthesia with methods mutually recognised.

As a second step and in the long term, surgical castration of pigs should be abandoned by 1 January 2018.

To ensure the implementation of the end of surgical castration the following tools shall be available and applicable:

- a) Mutually recognised methods for the assessment of boar taint;
- b) European recognised reference methods for the measurement of each of the compounds responsible for boar taint;
- c) Rapid detection methods for boar taint at slaughter plants;
- d) Reduction of boar taint compounds by pig breeding and/or management and feeding;
- e) The production systems and management of entire males during rearing, transport and at slaughter, to minimise sexual and aggressive behaviours.

The costs for implementing the end of surgical castration shall be shared between the economic actors of the chain. An annual public report shall assess the progress in the development and effectiveness of the tools mentioned above as well as the costs for implementing the end of surgical castration and their sharing between the economic actors of the chain.

However, in the case of pig meat registered under "traditional specialties guaranteed" or with "geographical indications" (Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)) and pig meat produced for traditional high quality products to be listed in accordance with point 6, castration is unavoidable to meet the current quality standards.

To ensure a sustainable and competitive pig meat chain in the EU, a European partnership on pig castration, supported and funded by the European Commission, should be established in order to:

1. Ensure the acceptance of products from pigs not surgically castrated by the authorities and the consumers in the European Union but also in third country markets.
2. Agree on a common understanding of boar taint.
3. Perform or coordinate research and development and achieve results on:
 - a) mutually recognised methods for the assessment of boar taint;
 - b) European recognised reference method for the measurement of each of the compounds responsible for boar taint;
 - c) rapid detection methods for boar taint at slaughter plants;
 - d) reduction of boar taint compounds by pig breeding and/or management and feeding;
 - e) the production systems and management of entire males during rearing, transport and at slaughter to minimise sexual and aggressive behaviours;
 - f) alternatives to surgical castration with analgesia and/or anaesthesia in the case of pig meat registered under "traditional specialties guaranteed" or with "geographical indications" (Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)) and pig meat produced for traditional high quality products as listed in point 6.
4. Develop information and training of farmers and other members of the whole pork chain.
5. Launch a cost/benefit analysis on the consequences of the end of surgical castration, including an analysis of the change in production costs in various production systems, the costs/benefits affecting the different levels of the pork chain and the cost sharing plans between the economic actors of the chain.
6. Develop a list of traditional productions requiring heavier pigs covered by the derogation mentioned above.
7. Publish the above mentioned annual report. The report will also include a part on the costs for implementing the end of surgical castration and their distribution.

This declaration is drafted and signed by several actors in the European pig sector, European retailers and NGO's. The declaration is an open invitation for every actor in the European pig sector and European retailers to join this voluntary initiative. The European Commission and the Belgian Presidency act as facilitators to encourage private parties to subscribe to this declaration.

We hereby call on everyone to join this declaration by publicly endorsing it.

Signatories: