

Danish Agriculture and Food Council, LTO Nederland (Dutch pig farmers organisation) and FVE (Federation of Veterinarians for Europe).

Signatories have agreed that, as of 1 January 2012, the surgical castration of piglets may only be carried out if prolonged analgesia and/or anaesthesia is used, and that by 1 January 2018, castration may not be performed at all (although castration will still be permitted in production systems registered under 'traditional specialties guaranteed' or with 'geographical indications').

To assist with meeting the deadline for castration, a European partnership on pig castration has been set up with financial support from the European Commission. The aim of this group is to facilitate the carrying out of seven key tasks laid out in the Declaration, such as: agreeing on a common understanding of boar taint; co-ordinating research on methods for recognising boar taint; exploring means of reducing boar taint through breeding (some breeds, eg Duroc, are particularly prone to boar taint, whilst others, eg Hampshire, have naturally low levels); investigating production systems and management of entire males during rearing, transport and at slaughter to reduce sexual and aggressive behaviours; and carrying out a cost/benefit analysis on prohibiting castration.

The focus of the Declaration is on co-operation between interested parties, including the sharing of any costs associated with prohibiting castration, and it is hoped that other operators within the pig industry will join this voluntary initiative and assist with improving the welfare of pigs throughout the EU.

European Declaration on Alternatives to Surgical Castration of Pigs (December 2010). Voluntary declaration signed by key stakeholders in the pig industry. For further information, please visit the following website, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/farm/initiatives_en.htm.

E Carter
UFAW

Online learning resource available on pig production, welfare and meat quality

Q-PorkChains is an EU-funded research project in which 62 organisations from 19 countries are involved. One output of the project is the Q-PorkChains Open Learning Platform (OLP), an online learning resource covering the pig production industry and pork quality. The OLP provides freely available teaching resources to anyone interested in the pig industry and programmes are divided into modules (chain management, consumer, pig production, product quality) and categories (animal welfare, consumer behaviour, education, meat quality, pork chain, product development, sustainability). Many of the learning resources are provided in a number of different languages.

Within the animal welfare category there are nine learning resources available. Resources vary between explanatory video presentations, such as demonstrating a rapid test for detecting elevated acute phase protein levels in pigs, to a more lecture-style format, eg covering animal welfare-

friendly pig housing systems in which users are led through key points of the subject area using notes, charts and video, and which culminates in a self-assessment test. Once users have completed an online course then they have the option of evaluating and feeding-back on their experience of the learning programme.

The long-term goal of Q-PorkChains OLP is to develop a sustainable and dynamic learning resource for use by teachers, trainers, students and employees in the pig production and pig meat industry. It is hoped that such an open and community-type platform will enable people to share their learning experiences and users are invited to contribute to the OLP by submitting their own teaching and learning resources.

Q-PorkChains Open Learning Platform (2011). EU Project funded via the EU 6th Framework Programme, 2007-2011. Q-PorkChains OLP is available at the following website: www.pork-training.org.

E Carter
UFAW

Defra publishes review of the UK Animal Welfare Research Programme 2005–2010

In 2009/2010 approximately £32.5 million of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) research budget was allocated to animal health and welfare research and, of this, £2.9 million was spent on animal welfare research specifically. The Defra animal welfare research programme consists of seven sub-programmes: on-farm poultry; on-farm pigs; on-farm ruminants; on-farm fish; companion animals and game birds; transport and markets; and slaughter. The results from research within these areas are utilised by Defra to ensure that existing animal welfare policies are based on scientific evidence, to identify the need for new policy development and to support Defra in its regulatory role.

In December 2010 Defra published their *Review of the Animal Welfare Research Programme 2005–2010*. The aim of this review was to: evaluate completed and current research projects; to assess the current animal welfare research programme in relation to current policy needs; and to consider the future direction and priorities of the programme. To achieve these aims a panel of Defra officials and external referees considered each of the seven sub-programmes within animal welfare under the following headings: Success of research in providing value to Defra; Issues and areas of concern relating to this research; Research gaps and future priorities; and Balance of funding.

Review of the Animal Welfare Research Programme 2005–2010 (December 2010). A4, 44 pages. Published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Further information about this publication and copies are available from: Animal Welfare Research Programme Manager, Veterinary Research Unit, Nobel House, Area 4A, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR.

E Carter
UFAW