

Policy Case-Study: Transitioning away from farrowing crates in UK pig production

1. Description of policy change	<p>Move away from current use of farrowing crates in the UK to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Free farrowing 2.Temporary crating. <p>Unconfined farrowing systems which are too small, or too large, can result in increased piglet mortality. Temporary crating systems which more closely reflect the model in Germany could be considered with the farrowing pen area of 6.5m² and the sow confined the day before the predicted day of farrowing and perhaps 3 or 4 days after farrowing.</p>
2. UK animal populations affected (species, systems, numbers)	<p>Pig</p> <p>In the UK, about 40% of sows are kept outdoors and will not be confined during farrowing. The remaining 60% are kept indoors and the vast majority will farrow in crates.</p>
3. Current different main systems of production for that species (for example, Defra view on the named systems which currently exist for laying hens)	<p>Freefarrowing.org has a range of systems. Free Farrowing</p> <p>A project commissioned by Defra led to the development of the PigSAFE free farrowing pen and the development of FreeFarrowing.org. See freefarrowing.org for the full range of different systems available, but in short</p> <p>Traditional farrowing crate- where sows are confined throughout farrowing and lactation (around 4 weeks – i.e. until piglets are weaned). Size is limited and sows cannot turn around. Typical footprint is 3.6m² with the area for piglets (sow area typically 2.2mx0.50m).</p> <p>Free farrowing systems - where sows are non-confined during farrowing and lactation.</p> <p>Temporary crating – systems where the sow is generally first confined for farrowing and the following few days, but is later unrestrained for most of lactation.</p> <p>Alternative farrowing systems – Pens. Design and size varies, but most have solid floor and straw as enrichment. Can be deep bedded straw. Can be group farrowing but this uncommon.</p>
4. Proportion of the different systems in the UK at current time and likely post-policy	<p>See 2. Vast majority of sows use farrowing crates in indoor units. (Information from AHDB 2019 suggested around 250k sows).</p> <p>Outdoor free farrowing will remain static. Outdoor pig production is already saturated as the land topography/location is a limiting factor. Local opposition is also a consideration.</p>

5. Likely impacts foreseen as a result of the policy change	<p>Sow welfare improved – ability to exhibit more normal behaviours (nest building), more freedom of movement, more options for environmental enrichment, and piglet welfare remains protected (mortality static/not increased).</p> <p>AHDB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some evidence is available that suggests production benefits, such as a lower rearing mortality and/or an extra piglet born alive per litter, might be achievable in well-managed alternative indoor farrowing systems. Training of stockpersons and sows and consistent use of chosen farrowing system will be necessary to optimise productivity. This could help offset additional costs associated with the larger floor space.
6. Any linked recent policy changes (are there any other policy changes or policy directions which may also impact this same area?)	x
7. Legal basis for current systems (of the system(s) under consideration) - e.g. if policy is for a change in stocking density, a statement of current regulation around stocking density	<p>Current requirements for pigs are set in WOFAR (Sched 1 and specifically Sched 8).</p> <p>Defra's pig welfare code also provides guidance in the section on 'Farrowing sows and piglets' and notes that <i>'The aim is for farrowing crates to no longer be necessary and for any new system to protect the welfare of the sow, as well as her piglets. Where the sow is confined in a farrowing crate, it should be large enough to accommodate her and to allow her to rise and lie down without difficulty and should be easily accessed in an emergency. The crate length should be sufficient to allow space for farrowing. The sow should only be confined in a crate for the minimum time possible following farrowing. Where the farrowing crate incorporates a design that can be opened up to allow the sow to turn freely, this should be carried out as soon as practicable and usually within four days of farrowing, unless there is an overriding health or welfare reason to alter this.'</i></p>
8. Animal 'lifecycle' information specific to the system(s) under consideration – e.g relevant information on common management practices for the system(s) under discussion	<p>See welfare code for further information about management: Code of practice for the welfare of pigs (publishing.service.gov.uk)</p>

<p>9. Any other available detail about the policy change proposed (e.g. from a Defra policy appraisal)</p>	<p>The reason farrowing crates are used is to protect piglets from being crushed by the sow – which is one of the greatest causes in piglet mortality; the sow is significantly larger than her offspring (about 150 times the size). The system also helps stockpeople, making it safer to carry out management activities with sows and piglets and easier to clean.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piglet mortality and stockperson safety can be a challenge for alternative farrowing systems. • Restriction on sow movement and ability to express normal behaviour while in the crate has attracted increasing concern. • Alternatives to traditional crates (the design, furnishing, size, flooring: solid or part slatted and more enrichment options etc) needs to ensure the welfare of both the sow and piglets. • There have been a number of studies looking at alternative indoor farrowing systems, some with mixed results. Some studies have been able to achieve pre-weaning mortality levels comparable with conventional farrowing crates, whereas others have seen higher levels.
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