

Reforming Pig Welfare in the EU: The Case for a Cage-Free Future

1 Cages in Pig Farming

Female pigs (gilts and sows) are caged for about 160 days a year. The pig farming sector uses two types of cages: sow stalls and farrowing crates. Both are narrow metal structures running along the length of a pig's body, only allowing them to stand, sit, or lie down, but preventing them from turning around.

Sow stalls are used during breeding and subsequent pregnancy stages, while farrowing crates are used for female pigs that are farrowing (birthing) and nursing their litter.

The main alternatives to these systems are group housing of gilts and sows during breeding and pregnancy, and using farrowing pens for a sow and her piglets during birthing and nursing. Technical details of such alternatives differ across the sector, but primarily, they offer female pigs more space compared to confinement in stalls or crates.

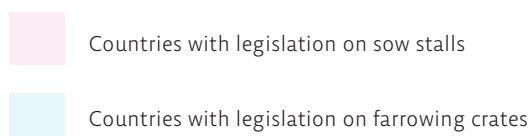
2 Regulation of Sow Stalls and Farrowing Crates

The EU has adopted minimum standards for the keeping of pigs, which EU Member States have codified into their respective national laws. These standards partially ban sow stalls: female pigs must be housed in groups from four weeks after natural mating or insemination until one week before expected farrowing.

EU law, however, does not prohibit or limit the practice of keeping mother pigs in farrowing crates. While these crates are arguably inconsistent with the basic principles of animal care under EU animal welfare legislation, the lack of an explicit ban has allowed them to remain widespread across the EU.

Several EU Member States have adopted national legislation on the housing of female pigs that goes beyond the EU minimum standards. Five Member States have passed legislation prohibiting or restricting the use of farrowing crates: Sweden (full ban on farrowing crates), Germany, Austria,

Map: National regulation of housing systems for female pigs



Denmark (ban on permanent confinement in farrowing crates during nursing), and Finland (ban on new farrowing crates).

3 Impact of Farrowing Crates on Animal Welfare

Farrowing crates severely limit a sow's ability to move. Because the sow is so restricted, she cannot carry out many of her natural behaviors. In particular, her opportunity to build a nest before giving birth is severely restricted, as is her ability to express normal maternal behaviors toward her piglets.

Farrowing crates can also have a number of negative effects on sows, including causing physical injuries, heat stress, distress, repetitive behaviours, pain, fear, discomfort, and frustration.

Overall, farrowing crates do not provide an adequate environment for sows or their piglets and raise serious concerns about their health and welfare.

4 Economic and Welfare Impact Assessment of a Potential Farrowing Crate Ban

Our White Paper proposes an EU-wide ban on the use of farrowing crates and analyzes the costs of introducing such a measure.

In economic terms, we estimate that switching to a system without farrowing crates would increase the cost of producing pig meat by just under 1 cent per kilogram (EUR 0.008/kg). Across the industry as a whole, this would result in an estimated additional cost of EUR 1.11 billion.

The main driver behind this increase would primarily be higher building costs per sow and increased labor requirements. These costs, however, would be partially offset by faster piglet weight gain in farrowing pens.

When the animal welfare benefits of such a measure are expressed in monetary terms, the estimated benefits of banning farrowing crates are 40 times greater than the costs. Two alternative valuation approaches produce even higher benefit-cost ratios of 376 and 908. This shows that the transition costs would be small compared to the expected welfare gains.

Consult the full paper [here](#).

