



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Health and food audits and analysis

DG(SANTE) 2016-8770 - MR

FINAL REPORT OF A STUDY VISIT  
CARRIED OUT IN  
FINLAND  
FROM 25 JANUARY 2016 TO 29 JANUARY 2016  
IN ORDER TO  
SHARE BEST PRACTICE ON REARING PIGS WITH INTACT TAILS

*In response to information provided by the Competent Authority, any factual error noted in the draft report has been corrected; any clarification appears in the form of a footnote.*

### ***Executive Summary***

*This study visit took place in Finland from 25 to 29 January 2016 and is one of three visits, along with Sweden and Switzerland, to see how these countries manage to keep pigs with intact tails. The study group was made up of two Commission officials and national experts from Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland and Spain.*

*The objective was to facilitate the five national experts to assess the situation in a country which has successfully implemented a ban on routine tail docking of pigs, to identify good practices and consider how these might be incorporated into their approach to this issue.*

*The study visit approach is part of the Commission's initiatives to address long standing problem areas for animal welfare. Previous study visits on the welfare of animals during transport have led to increased co-operation and communication between the competent authorities of the Member States and improvements in controls.*

*This study visit looked at the background and ongoing implementation of the successful ban on the tail docking of pigs in Finland. The national experts met a wide range of bodies including, competent authorities, pig farmers and producer associations, representatives from the meat industry, farm advisory services and veterinary practitioners.*

*Following the visit, the five national experts considered the practical relevance of the activities and information from the study visit, and reviewed this together with their administrations. The CAs of the five national experts indicated that despite differences in the model of pig production, the study visit was beneficial to see solutions to the tail-biting/tail docking issue, and would seek to disseminate the good practices seen in Finland.*

*The German authorities commented that the very focussed information obtained would be used in the ongoing projects and activities on reducing tail biting and avoiding tail docking including in the Animal Welfare Working Group of the Länder Working Group for Consumer Protection a transnational coordination group working on the implementation of Recommendation (EU) 2016/336. The national expert from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) indicated that the input of all sectors of the production chain seen in Finland was paramount and that this approach is currently being followed in a pilot project in NRW with 60 farms where tail docking is not practiced on 50-100 pigs per farm and farmers are intensively trained and supported by trained consultants.*

*The Austrian, Danish and Spanish authorities commented that the mission had been useful and that the information obtained would be considered for any future developments to reduce tail biting and avoid routine tail docking.*

*The Irish authorities commented that Ireland has recently carried out a review of the pig industry and produced a report by a pig industry stakeholder group. Pig welfare was included in this report and further enhancement of the welfare aspects can be included in the implementation of its recommendations.*

*The Commission services will hold a meeting with stakeholders and experts from all MS to consider the overview from this series of study visits and will upload all the documents considered useful to a collaborative group site on the Commission's database (CIRCABC) for sharing information with, amongst others, public administrations.*

# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>FACTORS TO MAINTAIN PIGS WITH INTACT TAILS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>CLOSING MEETING .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>OVERALL CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>ISSUES CONSIDERED BY PARTICIPATING CA FOR INCLUSION IN THEIR SYSTEM OF CONTROLS .....</b>	<b>9</b>

## ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
CA	Competent Authority
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
MS	Member State

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The study visit took place in Finland from 25 to 29 January 2016 and is one of three visits, the others are to Sweden and Switzerland, to see how these countries manage to keep pigs with intact tails. The study group comprised two members of the Commission Services and a national expert from each of the following Member States (MS): Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland and Spain. The study group was accompanied throughout the visit by representatives of the Finnish Competent Authorities (the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Finnish Food Safety Authority- hereafter the CA).

This study visit is part of the Commission's initiative to achieve better implementation of the EU legislation on the protection of pigs<sup>1</sup> which requires that tail docking must not be carried out routinely but only where there is evidence that injuries have occurred. Before carrying out these procedures, other measures shall be taken to prevent tail-biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities. For this reason inadequate environmental conditions or management systems must be changed. A Commission Recommendation has been recently published which provides measures which should be applied in accordance with Directive 2008/120/EC<sup>2</sup> (hereafter the pig directive). Full legal references are given in Annex 1. Legal acts quoted in this report refer, where applicable, to the last amended version.

## **2 OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE**

The objective was to facilitate the five Member States' national experts to assess the situation in a country which has successfully implemented a ban on routine tail docking of pigs, to identify good practices and consider how these might be incorporated into their country's approach to this issue. The study visit took place in agreement with the Finnish authorities.

In terms of the scope, the CA was asked to present: the background to banning tail docking in Finland, the economic impact of such a ban, involvement of different bodies, how tail biting is managed, and official controls of farms.

---

<sup>1</sup> Paragraphs 4 and 8 of Annex I of Council Directive 2008/120/EC of 18 December 2008 laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs (OJ L 47 18.2.2009)

<sup>2</sup> Commission Recommendation (EU) 2016/336 of 8 March 2016 on the application of Council Directive 2008/120/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs as regards measures to reduce the need for tail-docking (OJ L 62, 9.3.2016)

In pursuit of the objective the following meetings were held and sites visited:

Meetings/Visits		No.	Comments
Competent Authority	Central	2	Initial and closing meetings
	Regional	2	Official controls of farms
Other bodies		11	Pig producers association; university researchers; veterinary practitioners; slaughterhouse operators
Slaughterhouse Operators /quality assurance schemes		3	Role of slaughterhouse operators. Monitoring of tail bitten pigs at slaughterhouses.
Farms		2	Visit to one farm with 2800 breeding sows producing piglets to 30kg. Visit to one commercial farm fattening piglets mainly from 30kg to finishing but also from 8kg onwards.

### 3 BACKGROUND

1. Pig production in Finland has historically and traditionally not been associated with tail docking. Tail docking was implicitly banned through the Statute on Animal Protection 396/1996 (paragraph 14), and the Act on Animal Protection 247/1996 (paragraph 7).
2. Finland's entry into the European Union led to a very small number of farmers challenging the basic Finnish welfare laws banning cruel practices and a push for routine tail docking. These farmers were taken to court in Finland by the CA which lost its case ultimately at the upper level in 1998.
3. In 2002 the CA took the strategic decision to strengthen the national law on cruelty by introducing a specific ban on tail docking of pigs through an amendment to the Statute on Animal Protection 396/1996. There was no transitional period and no financial support given to farmers.
4. The provincial veterinary officers working for the Regional State Administrative Agencies or municipal veterinarians working for the local authorities have followed this up since 2007 with farm inspections (2-8% of farms on risk and random basis including cross compliance controls) to ascertain the levels of tail docking and tail biting. There have been no instances of tail docking detected through the field visits since then.
5. Legislation on the collection of tail-biting data during meat inspections at slaughterhouses has been in force since the 1990s. The CA has been monitoring the incidence of tail biting in slaughterhouses since 2013 using existing slaughterhouse classification systems to grade tails in 2-4 levels. The CA is working to develop a consistent system of classification for assessing whether a tail has been bitten and the severity of the lesions.
6. The average incidence of tail biting in slaughter pigs detected between 2013 and 2014 is 1% with a range of 0.5% to 3.1% and it is reducing. Farmers receive

feedback on incidences of tailbiting from the *Sikava* system (see below), to which data from the slaughterhouses' system is transferred via an interface. The CA is obliged to record data on meat inspection findings in the regulatory control system (ELVI). In addition, if it is suspected that a farm that delivered animals to a slaughterhouse violated animal protection legislation, the official veterinarian is obliged to notify this directly to the Regional State Administrative Agency. The provincial veterinary officer will then order the municipal veterinarian to carry out a farm inspection. There has been an extremely low incidence of these visits.

7. The CA has joined forces with pig farmers, the industry, researchers and advisory organisation to develop shared goals to improve the welfare of pigs and reduce tailbiting. This has included the production of guidelines on improving management practices thereby improving farm conditions. This enables farmers to produce pigs with very low and consistently reducing levels of tail biting. To this end the CA, together with the entities mentioned above has published guidance and held training events for its own staff and producers on: feeding and watering of pigs; care of sick pigs and when to euthanise; production of clean pigs; pig farm building construction and guidance on what is sufficient enrichment material.
8. The CA was a key participant and funded the “Pig Project”. This was developed by the Association of Finnish Pig Farmers and the privately run Association for Animal Disease Prevention (Animal Health ETT) to raise the level of awareness and compliance among farmers on certain difficult management issues such as the adequacy and suitability of enrichment material, antibiotic usage and dealing with sick or injured pigs. Even though there has been full compliance during the same period for pigs to have intact tails, inadequate provision of enrichment material has been a consistent finding on pig farms from 2003 onwards - though it has been reducing since the Pig Project from a high of approximately 30% non-compliance in 2010 to 4% in 2014. In 2010-2014, over 4 000 people visited events organised in connection with the project (90% of the 1 500 or so pig farmers in Finland, some of whom participated events).
9. Control of tail biting was not a primary objective of the Pig Project. However, the CA reported much better cooperation in several at all levels in the pig sector as a result of developing the pig project and in working together to ensure the messages from the project are actually implemented at farm level.
10. The CA has also included financial support to the industry to raise welfare and thereby production standards. Since 2008, as part of the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland, measures have been taken to promote animal welfare. Support may be applied for by farmers who want to implement welfare standards above the minimum requirements under national legislation. It is not possible to select at the same time payments for the same thing, for example bedding in stalls for weaned piglets and fattening pigs and enrichment materials for pigs. Support is granted per livestock unit, not per pig and this is defined in the

rural development programme on the basis of the Commission Regulation: sows represent 0.5 livestock units, other pigs 0.3 livestock units, except weaned piglets 0-3 month age group where only 2/3 of a livestock unit is taken into account in total. The measures selected to receive animal welfare payments for pigs and the relevant payment amounts are listed below per livestock unit:

<b>Measures to Promote Animal Welfare</b>	<b>Animal Welfare Payments (€)</b>
Feeding and care of pigs	7
Outdoor access for idle sows and first-farrowing sows	33
Improving the conditions under which sows and first-farrowing sows are reared	38
Improved farrowing conditions	349
Bedding in stalls for weaned piglets and fattening pigs	59
Relief for castration pain and alternatives to surgical castration:	
• Pain relief before and after surgical castration	27
• Immunocastration	81
Enrichment materials	13
Pens for sick animals and care	19

11. The CA has funded research on tail biting through the: Nordic Project, the Farewell Dock EU project and a project on enrichment material. Researchers in Finland are usually able to carry out research on farm, due to the provision of payments to participating farmers and the close working relationship between pig industry, researchers and CA.
12. The close relationship of Finnish pig farmers, through their Pig Association working with the CA, as illustrated by the Pig Project, and their interaction with ETT, advisory organisations and the meat industry, provides an example of a broad grouping with a common strategy to improve the management conditions on farm resulting in improved welfare conditions for animals.
13. The Finnish ban on tail docking of pigs is not seen now as an economic hindrance *per-se* on the production of pigs, on the contrary, the ban on the practice of tail docking has led by default to improving the standards of management on farms necessary to maintaining stress at a low enough level to be able to manage pigs with intact tails, whilst raising production to levels required to compete in difficult economic circumstances.
14. The ban has now been accepted by the farming community on ethical grounds but is held up as an example of uneven interpretation and enforcement of the Directive

across the EU.

15. Slaughterhouse operators who implement quality assurance schemes have an important role to play in the conditions under which they require pigs to be produced to meet their Quality Assurance standards. In all cases, these standards require higher animal welfare requirements than the legal minimum, and have done so for many years. Their advisors play an important role in consultancy and resolution of management issues. The latest laws on requirements for animal welfare on pig farms (2012) were derived from the existing Quality Assurance requirements laid down by slaughterhouse operators.
16. Animal Health (*Sikava* ETT) is a voluntary national scheme for herd health management involving farmers, farm veterinarians and slaughterhouses. All producers sending pigs to slaughter are required to fulfil the basic animal health requirements indicated in section 30 below. These health issues, as well as animal welfare issues, and antibiotic usage are recorded during farm visits performed by contracted private practitioners at a frequency varying from 4 times per year to every second week depending upon herd size. Since 2010 farm vets have been using a modified Welfare Quality system to record on farm: incidence of tail biting and body condition scores in sows. The requirement concerning the sufficiency of enrichment materials is verified in accordance with both animal welfare legislation and Evira guidelines. The ongoing trend has been positive for all these indicators.

#### **4 FACTORS TO MAINTAIN PIGS WITH INTACT TAILS**

17. All relevant bodies reported that tail biting does occur but it is not regarded as a major issue, and when it did occur was mostly individual animals which were quickly identified. Biters were universally seen as a sign of a stressed pig. Outbreaks could occur when a group was stressed which is usually related to problems with the available feeding space, the timing of feeding or ventilation. Such stresses would act as a tipping point if other risk factors were already present.
18. The information below is provided under headings which are the risk parameters in Article 3 of Commission Recommendation (EU) 2016/336. All groups emphasised that it is management that is the key to keeping pigs with intact tails, and not one single factor on its own.

##### **Provision of enrichment materials**

19. The Competent Authority has focussed on improving the provision of enrichment material (enrichment material) as indicated above in sections 7 and 8.
20. Surveys of pig producers, the farmers met during the mission and industry sources all indicated that the provision of enrichment material was of much less importance to them in preventing tail biting than other factors that reduce stress levels. They all agreed that the provision of enrichment material in sufficient quantities over

targeted periods was extremely effective in reducing the incidence of tail biting.

21. The design of systems providing enrichment material and their positioning was stated to be critically important if the materials are to be: used by pigs; not wasted by fouling or being too easily pulled from dispensers; in the correct location in the pen so that they don't interfere with resting or feeding routines.
22. The two farms visited (breeding/fattening and fattening) both received subsidies for the use of additional enrichment material. Both farms used long, non-chopped straw, or alfalfa distributed from hay racks over feed troughs and over solid floors or partly solid floor sections of the pens (pens also had slatted sections) and reported only minimal problems (2-3 times per year) with slurry blockages which were dealt with by mobile agitators. In addition peat with added iron was added to the pens of newly transferred weaning pigs to assist with the change in environment.
23. Slurry system design was provided by either Finnish, Danish, Dutch or German companies supplying standard systems and components. Both farms visited used gravity drainage and wide bore (in comparison to other EU countries) slurry drainage channels (farm 1: 315 mm for weaner/fattener accommodation, 250 mm for farrowing accommodation and farm 2: 250 mm for weaner/fatteners).

### **Cleanliness**

24. This was not seen *per-se* as an important factor in the production of pigs with intact tails, but as an indicator of good management systems overall, with the proviso that even the best systems had pens with varying levels of, dirty pigs, with intact tails and other pens where the pigs kept themselves very clean. Cleanliness was one of the issues which the pig project (see 9) focused on.

### **Thermal comfort and air quality**

25. These were considered by the pig producers to be extremely important in maintaining low stress levels. The general design imperatives for ventilation in the farms visited were to limit the flow of cold air over pigs sleeping areas and prevent agitated air flow over slurry channels.
26. Heated floors are drier and as a result pigs are cleaner. The design of heat recovery systems for the Nordic climate using the latent heat in slurry systems to provide heating for the farm also had the added benefit of cooling the slurry and reducing the production of ammonia. Where this had been successfully implemented, this, together with carefully designed ventilation systems limited the irritant effect of the ammonia in the pens and was seen to be effective in providing a warm fresh environment.
27. Not all of the ventilation or flooring systems seen were as effective (even in the

same farms) and the best results had been achieved by incremental modifications based upon trial and error.

28. Close attention to the conservation of heat in materials used for piglet creep pen design were also stated to be extremely important in stabilising this class of animals' thermal comfort, maximising growth and reducing the later likelihood of tail biting and other abnormal behaviours developing.

### **Health status**

29. Finland enjoys a particularly high national pig health status. It is completely free from porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS) and atrophic rhinitis. There have been individual cases of enzootic pneumonia, swine dysentery, salmonella and mange, but very few. The intensive monitoring carried out by both the ETT on farm and the quality assurance schemes in slaughterhouses provide excellent feedback to farmers on a range of health and welfare conditions and have enabled high health and production to be sustained while ensuring high standards of animal welfare. Vets and other advisors play an important role to ensure hygienic barriers in buildings, to avoid mixing, prevent diarrhoea, and reduce chronic risk factors so that pigs are not at high level of stress. This input also results in a reduced need for antibiotics.

### **Competition for food and space**

30. Sufficient space to feed individually without fear from competitors and at a frequency of feeding which gave the animals a regular expectation of food throughout the day was valued as the most important factor in reducing stress levels in the farms visited. Quality assurance schemes varied in their exact requirements but required trough lengths of approximately 17cm/piglet rising to 33cm/fattener.
31. Space allowances in Finnish legislation from 2012 require 0.9m<sup>2</sup> for finishing pigs. In addition there is a prohibition on fully slatted floors and two thirds of the flooring must be solid but there is a 15 year transitional period for this requirement. However, quality assurance companies have required 0.8m<sup>2</sup> for this class of pigs since the 1990s, even though the Finnish legislation was comparable with EU requirements of 0.65m<sup>2</sup>/finishing pig. Space allowance was seen to be important but not the most important of a number of variables that need to be properly managed to rear pigs with intact tails.

### **Diet**

32. The composition of diets and the frequency of feeding were viewed as critically important in managing the daily liveweight gains, overcoming difficult transition periods throughout the production phase for fattening pigs (creep-weaning-fattening-2<sup>nd</sup> stage fattening/finishing) and in controlling the limitations in growth

(and therefore stress) imposed when rearing replacement gilts.

33. The importance of diet was highlighted for the gilts in one farm e.g.: the unavailability of what the farmer considered to be a particularly well formulated feed (in the absence of any other farm management changes) had resulted in higher than average incidence of tail-biting.
34. Diet regimes varied but one farm utilising liquid feed in the production of 30kg weaners used a reducing frequency of six feeds per day post-weaning falling to four for fattening with different compositions for each transition stage of the pig's life. Many farms used ad-libitum systems and average daily live weight gains of 960g/day compare very favourably to other EU countries.
35. Both farms visited and the majority in Finland are utilising liquid diets, with a strong emphasis on adequacy of fresh water being made available to all classes of animals. Legislation on subsidised construction and quality standards set down the number of nipple drinkers per pen (1/10 animals).

## **5 CLOSING MEETING**

On 29 January 2016 a closing meeting was held with the CA where the five national experts presented their preliminary conclusions on the study visit.

## **6 OVERALL CONCLUSION**

The CAs of the five national experts indicated that despite differences in the model of pig production, the study visit was beneficial to see solutions to the tail-biting/tail docking issue, and would seek to disseminate the good practices seen in Finland.

The German authorities commented that the very focussed information obtained would be used in the ongoing projects and activities on reducing tail biting and avoiding tail docking including in the Animal Welfare Working Group of the Länder Working Group for Consumer Protection a transnational coordination group working on the implementation of Recommendation (EU) 2016/336. The national expert from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) indicated that the input of all sectors of the production chain seen in Finland was paramount and that this approach is currently being followed in a pilot project in NRW with 60 farms where tail docking is not practiced on 50-100 pigs per farm and farmers are intensively trained and supported by trained consultants.

The Austrian, Danish and Spanish authorities commented that the mission had been useful and that the information obtained would be considered for any future developments to reduce tail biting and avoid routine tail docking.

The Irish authorities commented that Ireland has recently carried out a review of the pig industry and produced a report by a pig industry stakeholder group. Pig welfare was included in this report and further enhancement of the welfare aspects can be included in the implementation of its recommendations.

The Commission services will hold a meeting with stakeholders and experts from all MS to consider the overview from this series of study visits and will upload all the documents considered useful to a collaborative group site on the Commission's database (CIRCABC) for sharing information with, amongst others, public administrations.

## 7 ISSUES CONSIDERED BY PARTICIPATING CA FOR INCLUSION IN THEIR SYSTEM OF CONTROLS

Country	Proposal for changes
AT	Austria has taken action since 2013 in a livestock intervention project which concerned tail docking in piglets. It examined current practices and alternatives put forward by participants from the perspective of animals/animal welfare, farmers and economics. It is expected that political discussions based on the above will lead to a modification of the Austrian legislation in this area.
DK	There were no specific proposals received from the Danish authorities.
DE	<p>The German authorities will utilise the information gained in their existing pilot and research projects and in the Animal Welfare Working Group (AGT) of the Länder Working Group for Consumer Protection (LAV) a transnational coordination group concerning the implementation of Recommendation (EU) 2016/336 on the application of Council Directive 2008/120/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs as regards measures to reduce the need for tail-docking.</p> <p>In this process, the findings and experience from Finland, including the specification of “other measures” (see Directive 2008/120/EC, Annex 1, paragraph 8.) for the improvement of housing conditions in establishments which are currently carrying out tail docking, are proving a useful and appropriate support to be able to avoid the routine tail docking of pigs as soon as possible.</p> <p>The national expert from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) indicated that the input of all sectors of the production chain seen in Finland was paramount and that this approach is currently being followed in a pilot project in NRW with 60 farms (50-100 pigs per farm) where tail docking is not practiced on and farmers are intensively trained and supported by trained consultants.</p>
ES	There were no specific proposals received from the Spanish authorities.
IE	Ireland has recently carried out a review of the pig industry and produced a report by a pig industry stakeholder group. Pig welfare was included in this report and further enhancement of the welfare aspects can be included in the implementation of its recommendations.

## ANNEX 1 – LEGAL REFERENCES

<b>Legal Reference</b>	<b>Official Journal</b>	<b>Title</b>
Dir. 2008/120/EC	OJ L 47, 18.2.2009, p. 5-13	Council Directive 2008/120/EC of 18 December 2008 laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs