

World Animal Protection Position on Farrowing Crates

Tuesday 11 March 2021

2000 – 2057

Date:	Tuesday 11 March 2021
Time:	8:00pm – 8:57pm
Location:	Teams Meeting
Attendees	
Subcommittee members:	NAWAC Subcommittee (Chair Included)
MPI Secretariat:	MPI Representatives
Invited Guests:	World Animal Protection Representatives

Meeting Summary:

On Thursday 11 March the NAWAC Pig Subcommittee met with representatives from World Animal Protection (WAP) to discuss the organisations position and recommendations moving forward for farrowing crates. One of the representatives has previously been involved heavily in the pig industry, both on farm and as a researcher of pig welfare.

World Animal Protection believe that:

- New Zealand is very well set up to endorse free farrowing options as there are a lot of outdoor farms and sows who have valuable and transmissible experience with outdoor farrowing.
- Any form of temporary crating is a challenge around the time of farrowing as it takes a lot of skill to know exactly when to crate the sow. The crating may influence the really important time where the sow gets set up for milk production and lactation. Any type of cage is not perceived well by the public – many companies globally are committing to “zero confinement” alternatives as the consumer demands it. Implementing temporary crating will place New Zealand in grave danger of going through the same process 10-15 years into the future.
- When a litter size is greater than 15 there are often higher mortality rates.
- Death is more an ethical consideration. Welfare is taken into consideration when looking at how the animal dies and what their experience was during that process. There is no question that crushing is a painful, unpleasant experience – and often seen in higher numbers outside of farrowing crates. However, farrowing crates often see rise in other mortality aspects such as still births and starvation.
- Provision of nesting material and allowing the sow to perform nest building behaviours assists in ways such as:
 - o Shorter farrowing times (higher levels of oxytocin produced)
 - o Greater milk production
- There are many materials that are used as nesting material. The ideal is at least 2kg of long stemmed straw which is kept topped up over the farrowing period. This can be provided on floor, in racks, or a combination of the two. A hessian sack is also useful in a pen as once the sow has farrowed the sack, containing the mothers’ scent, can be transferred to the creep

area to encourage the piglets to move to the area and avoid being crushed. Slurry systems may pose a problem when using long stemmed straw however there are other alternatives – they may not be the most ideal, nonetheless are better than nothing at all.

- Agnostic behaviour towards piglets is most often seen in gilts, due to a fear of novelty. In pen systems the gilt is able to orientate herself towards the piglets, escape towards a different area of the pen, and investigate the young. In crates, proper interaction with the piglets may not be achieved, which can contribute to an escalation of the behaviour to aggression and this may result in injury of the piglets. The aggression lasts longer simply because they were unable to investigate the piglets.
- There are wider benefits to zero confinement which extend beyond farrowing time. Group housed sows post weaning are less aggressive as throughout lactation they are free to move and can easily communicate with each other through bars of neighbouring pen. The sows have shown to also be fitter resulting in fewer leg problems and sores from crate bars – this assists with future breeding success and longevity. Piglet development, both cognitive and social aspects, are greatly influenced by a free farrowing system.