



WELFARE & NUTRITION

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LET'S TALK ABOUT... ON FARM EUTHANASIA

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Introduction

On-farm euthanasia is an emotional topic amongst farmers, veterinarians and stakeholders. Re (EC) 1099/2009 requires farms to have protocols in place that transparently describe the process and facilitate timely euthanasia. To successfully integrate a decision tool on farm the tool must be informative and practical. Therefore, we developed and tested an on-farm euthanasia protocol (decision tool).

Material and Methods

Firstly, practical criteria for the decision tool were defined by expert opinion. Secondly a concept decision tool was created and indicators for euthanasia were validated by a literature study. Thirdly, in the proof-of-concept-phase we performed a qualitative field study on four farms to evaluate farmers' interpretation and use of the decision tool, especially on the observation and decision on piglets with inconclusive indicators (birth weight, milk intake and behaviour) from literature.

Results

Based on literature euthanasia is justified in case of congenital disorders and traumas that render a piglet non-viable, untreatable diseases and inadequate response to treatment. However, literature remains ambiguous about "doubt-piglets" (it is doubtful for various reasons that it should be euthanized). Birth-weight alone cannot be used as a single indicator for euthanasia. However, combinations of birth weight, milk intake and behaviour seemed well definable indicators that are practical in use for farmers to justify euthanasia of non-viable pigs.

Discussion & Conclusion

Although the decision tool proved to be practical in use on farms and was able to standardize the decision process of euthanizing of "doubt-piglets" sufficient commitment by the farmer is needed to obtain full added value of such a protocol. Therefore the use of the decision tool should be embedded in the relation between farmer and herd veterinarian. In addition, the reasons for euthanasia can be regularly analysed which contributes to animal welfare and has the potential to enhance the overall performance of the farm.