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IMPLEMENTATION OF WELFARE QUALITY® PROTOCOL IN SLOVENIAN PIG FARMS

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Introduction

The aim of this study was to test the protocol (welfare measures) as a non-invasive way to assess the welfare of pigs, and establish critical limits of pigs' welfare, including health care, with emphasis on an individual animal.

Material and Methods

Welfare Quality® Protocol for pigs was used for the purposes of this study. The protocol describes the procedures and requirements for the assessment of pig welfare (sows, piglets, growing-finishing pigs). We used animal-based, management-based, or resource-based measures to achieve a representative assessment of pig welfare of each farm.

Ten conventional and ten alternative Slovenian pig farms were included. In this study, an alternative farm provided outdoor area for pigs, roughage and frequent possibility to forage.

Results

A total of 4.336 sows and 18.118 growing-finishing pigs in conventional housing system and a total of 185 sows and 622 growing-finishing pigs in alternative housing system were assessed. We were able to collect all measures only from 6 farms. Those farms raised 72 to 1600 breeding animals (all were conventional farms).

Conclusions

This was the first detailed insight into the state of welfare on the commercial pig farms in Slovenia. It was not possible to use all the assessment measures (stereotypies, clinical and health measures for pregnant and lactating sows), mostly because of a small number of animals on the farms (sample size was lower as required in the protocol). The protocol is not adapted to small farms. In Slovenia 93, 3 % of farms are small farms with 1 to 20 breeding animals and only 0,048 % of farms are large with more than 1000 breeding animals. Therefore, we believe that the current version of the protocol should be adapted to enable the implementation of this welfare assessment tool also in small-sized and alternative pig housing systems.

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