

The Finnish Veterinary Association's Animal Welfare Prize to a new-generation pig farm:

Paija Farm in Urjala

The association's fourth animal welfare prize was awarded to the Paija Farm in Urjala. The award was presented at the opening ceremony of the Annual Veterinary Congress on 28 November 2018 to a pig barn that was designed and built in a completely new way

Text and images: Anna Parkkari

The design of the pig barn on the Paija Farm focuses on the wellbeing of the pigs and workers, including issues such as indoor air quality, aggressive behaviour, feeding arrangements, enabling natural behaviour, and space allowance and pen design. The farm and on-farm slaughterhouse in Urjala are owned by Henna and Juha Paija. They now have around 700 pigs in the pig barn.

The following features give this farm an opportunity to provide wellbeing for animals and farmers: a seven-metre ceiling height that provides good indoor air quality, straw bedding, a suitable group size (30–40), pigs living their entire life in the same group, almost double the pen size required by law, opportunity for the pigs to go outdoors in the summer, slaughter in the on-farm slaughterhouse without long transport times, and young, motivated owners.

"The farmers have given great thought to the wellbeing of the pigs and made building decisions with that in mind. They have also designed the working conditions in the pig barn with consideration to the entire life cycle and the span of working life. This is important because the long-term wellbeing of the people caring for the animals is crucial for the wellbeing of the animals. The spatial solutions and practices in the pig barn work effectively to prevent aggressive behaviour and tail biting," says Maria Wahlfors, chair of the animal welfare committee of the Finnish Veterinary Association. The pig barn was completed in spring 2018.

MONITORING TAKES THE MOST TIME

The indoor air quality in the pig barn is excellent. Underfloor heating, walls that can be opened up, cell windows with shutters



The space is almost ten metres high and the observation terrace has good views. There are 20 pens in total, including a reception pen and a sick pen..



The building was completed in spring 2018. The outdoor areas are covered. On the right is the double fencing, required in case of animal diseases, that was still under construction at the time of taking the photo in September 2018. You can drive a tractor on the inside of the fence. The large dark door is used to drive a tractor in to clear the manure.

and the ridge skylight with shutters make it possible to regulate the ventilation of the pig barn according to the weather so that the indoor air is always fresh. At its highest point, the ceiling is about seven meters high.

In this tall building, you can see the entire pig barn from the control room, making it easy to monitor the pigs comprehensively. A considerable amount of time is spent on monitoring the pigs every day, and they say it is the most time-consuming job in the pig barn. During their visit, the association's animal welfare committee established that this purpose-built space and views work well, also for photography.

PIGS IN THEIR GROUPS ALMOST FROM BIRTH

The pigs are in pens in groups of between 30 and 40. Finishing pigs come in groups from two breeding pig farms; most are from Satu and Tuomas Levomäki in Loimaa and some from the Ollikkalan Olkiposu farm.

The groups have been together almost from birth and they will not be mixed with other groups at the Paija farm. The pig barn comprises 18 regular pens, a quarantine pen and a pen for sick animals.

Once a week, a group of pigs aged between 9 and 11 weeks arrives in the quarantine pen, where they are medicated against parasites before moving to a regular pen. Two thirds of the floor area in the quarantine pen is slatted. There has been little use for the sick pen as there have been very few sick pigs.

THE FINNISH VETERINARY ASSOCIATION'S ANIMAL WELFARE PRIZE

- The prize may be awarded to one or more persons or to a community that work with animals in a wide perspective.
- The award encourages better care for animal welfare and draws attention to, and rewards bodies that succeed in this.
- The prize has been awarded in 2009, 2012 and 2015, always at the opening ceremony of the Annual Veterinary Congress.
- The Board of Directors of the Finnish Veterinary Association decides on the prize based on the proposal of the association's Animal Welfare Committee.
- The recipient of the prize is selected from the bodies proposed by the members.
- Until now, the prize money of EUR 3,000 has always been donated by the Finnish Fair Foundation.

You can read more about the prizes at www.sell.fi. See the homepage in English.

"Loose farrowing suits our operations well. The pigs grow faster, they are used to straw, and there are few behavioural problems," Henna Paija says.

FEEDING ARRANGEMENTS REDUCE AGGRESSION

Feeding is continuous in the pig barn. The feeding area is at one end of the rectangular pen, elevated slightly from the rest of the pen. The feeding area is separated from the rest of the pen with a partition wall with a door at each side. Continuous feeding and this design of activities enables the animals to give each other room, reducing aggression. The raw material of the mineral fed to the animals comes from abroad; otherwise the feed is grown in Finland: cereal and broad bean grown on the farm with a tailored soy-free supplementary feed. The farm comprises one hundred hectares of arable land, of which 15 hectares are rented out. This land produces 85% of the feed required on the Paija loose-house pig farm. It is made up with feed acquired from the neighbours. The feeding area has slatted flooring, while the rest of the pen floor is solid. The bedding in the pig barn is straw, giving the animals the opportunity for species-specific natural behaviour, rooting. At one other end of the pen, the pigs have their toilet area that has no bedding or underfloor heating, unlike the rest of the pen. The area is easy to clean by machine, with the premises and the door location designed for this very purpose. The bedding is changed 2–3 times a week.

The farm has its own plant for producing wood chips.

The pigs can go outdoors almost throughout the year, which gives even more room per pig. The outside area has double fencing that complies with the latest animal diseases regulations, and the outdoor area is designed to be cleaned by machine.

For hot summer days, the farmers have thought about installing a shower for the pigs. It should be located in the feeding area as it has slatted flooring. "Of course, we must think of a way to keep the food dry", says Henna Paija.

ON-FARM SLAUGHTERHOUSE

At around six months, the pigs are slaughtered in the on-farm slaughterhouse. It is only 200 metres away, reducing the animals' stress levels.

Once a week, they slaughter the pigs in one pen. The animal transport routes are carefully designed to be as direct and clear as possible, avoiding 90-degree angles. "Lights can have a huge impact on the way the pigs move", the farmers explain.

They also take small numbers of cattle, horses and sheep in the slaughterhouse. They only have one slaughter day a week and the animals are brought in on the same morning. Animal owners transport the animals.



Trichina samples are delivered to the HK laboratory in Forssa. "It takes us 90 minutes to deliver the samples. If this lab stops taking in samples, the journey will be impossible. Cooperation is absolutely essential to us", the farmers say.

WELL THOUGHT OUT AND DESIGNED

The Paija couple say that they spent more than two years planning the new activities. They had mulled over the idea for much longer, over many years. During the planning, Juha Paija visited farms in Denmark with his sister Jaana Pehkonen, who is a veterinarian, and a fellow vet Kalle Hakala, who selected the farms.

"We live on the farm and wanted to create a meaningful job for ourselves. Our idea is to produce meat that costs more than traditionally produced meat and people eat less of it. Today, we sell all the meat we produce, some of it directly to restaurants. Of course, we wonder whether such a big investment will ever pay for itself". In

addition to the owners, the farm and the slaughterhouse employ four people.

Veterinarians Jouko Jakala and Johanna Bäckström know the pig farm well, as they also act as meat inspectors in the slaughterhouse. Anne Woivalin is the supervising veterinarian at the slaughterhouse.

The grounds for the Finnish Veterinary Association's Animal Welfare Prize 2018 state the following: "Careful comparisons of different solutions both in Finland and abroad have gone into designing the pig barn. The Paijas have taken an innovative approach to factors that improve animal welfare, and they have tackled any problems immediately".

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