

US: Pork producer choice on sow housing supported

At the National Pork Industry Forum last week, pork producers approved a resolution reaffirming the industry's position that producers should be able to select a sow housing system, including gestation stalls or individual maternity pens, which best promotes employee safety and animal care while ensuring a reliable supply of pork for consumers.



"Pork producers, working with veterinarians, understand what it takes to provide the best care and welfare for their animals," said Karen Richter, a farmer from Montgomery, Minn., and National Pork Board vice president. "The National Pork Board builds its animal and well-being programs on the foundation of what are best for the pig. By adopting this resolution, producers are reaffirming their commitment to choose what type of housing is best for their animals."

The National Pork Board provides educational programs and materials that focus on how producers can best ensure the well-being of their pigs. The programs offer methods that help producers take an objective look at each animal's well-being, independent of the size of farm or the specific type of housing.

A survey conducted in 2012 by University of Missouri Extension economist Ron Plain found that currently 17.3 percent of sows spend a portion of gestation in open pens. Plain surveyed pork farms with 1,000 or more sows and received responses from 70 farms, which combined own about 3.6 million of the nation's 5.7 million sows.

Plain's survey also found that 20.2 percent of sows on operations with 1,000 to 9,999 sows, 18.9 percent on farms with 10,000 to 99,000 sows and 16.4 percent on farms with more than 100,000 sows are in open pens for some portion of gestation. When asked about plans to put more sows in open pens, the largest farms indicated that 23.8 percent of their sows would be in them in two years; farms with 10,000 to 99,999 sows would have 21.3 percent of their pigs in such pens; and farms with 1,000 to 9,999 sows would have 20.7 percent. By comparison, a recent National Pork Board producer survey found that farms producing fewer than 5,000 hogs per year (approximately 200 sows or less) were more likely to use some form of open housing.

"Regardless of the system, what really matters is the individual care given to each pig," Richter said. "And we will continue to rely on science-based standards and our own long history of leadership in animal welfare to ensure that all animals are treated humanely."

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