

Weekly Overview: How Much Does the Sow Stall Ban Cost?

25 November 2013

GLOBAL - It has been suggested that the total ban on sow stalls in the UK could be costing producers one piglet per litter as the result of aggression between sows at the critical time before pregnancy is fully established. In Ireland, the deadline for compliance with the EU's partial stalls ban has been put back again. In the meantime, two groups are joining forces to push for an end to the castration of male pigs in the EU in 2018, while a UK animal charity says consumers want information on how animals are killed to be included on meat labels.

The total ban on sow stalls could be costing the UK pig industry one piglet per litter, a BPEX conference was told last week.

Aggression and stress seen in yarded systems in the first 30 days of pregnancy could be one of the factors holding back UK litter numbers, according to APMC managing director, Matthew Curtis.

Speaking at the levy board's Breed +3 event in Wetherby, Yorkshire, Mr Curtis said that Europe's system of housing sows in stalls for up to 30 days post-service is a production advantage.

He suggested that, were the UK to operate under a partial sow stall ban, the 'relatively low' average piglet output per UK sow per year would be move higher up the European chart.

At the same event, John Richardson of Production Performance Services Limited outlined some measures to prepare the gilt for a long and productive life.

His message was that farm data taken from Agrosoft and Easycare showed how UK replacement rates were higher in the UK than the major Dutch and Danish rivals as well as Spain and France.

Using data sets, he showed how around one-third of sows in the UK are culled before the third litter and that over 80 per cent of sows on most farms have burnt out before parity six.

The reasons for this are varied. However, problems with backs and legs are primary concerns, as is infertility - all indications of the case for increasing attention to good gilt management early on, he said.

While specific problems will hamper sow longevity on different farms, Mr Richardson advised producers to target the retention of young sows as an overreaching goal.

In Ireland, the deadline for conversion to loose housing of sows under the country's Sow Welfare Scheme has been extended again - this time from the end of September to the end of February 2014. That will be more than one year after the introduction of the European Union partial stalls ban.

Agriculture minister, Simon Coveney has said that a small group of producers have been unable to complete their conversion work by the September deadline.

Also on pig welfare, Eurogroup for Animals and the Dutch steering group 'Boars 2018' are to cooperate closely in Europe over the coming years to push for the realisation of the EU target to bring an end to the **castration of pigs across the EU** by 2018.

The Five Freedoms represent the foundation on which farm animal welfare stands but how can we encourage constant improvement as a guiding principle for all those involved in the meat, dairy and egg sectors?

Certification, monitoring and awards can all help as part of **building business sustainability**.

UK animal charity, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is calling on its supporters to contact their Members of the European Parliament, urging them to add their signature of support for **clearer labelling of welfare standards** on meat.