

RESPONSIBLE SOURCING



Production process

PIGS

Animal welfare considerations

- Barren environments
 - Extreme confinement of sows in mating stalls, sow stalls and farrowing crates
 - Husbandry procedures such as tail docking, teeth clipping, surgical castration and ear notching
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Definitions

Gilt – female pig who has not farrowed (given birth)

Sow – female pig who has farrowed (given birth)

Boar – male entire pig (not castrated)

Grower/weaner/finisher pig

– pig who is raised for meat



Pigs are smart, sociable and inquisitive animals. Today's pigs descend from wild boars domesticated approximately 10,000 years ago in various locations in Asia and then crossed with wild boars in Europe. A pig's natural lifespan may be up to 20 years, however in commercial pork production pigs can be slaughtered as young as 6 months.

The breeding animals in a pig herd include the boars, gilts and sows. Mating of pigs may occur via natural or artificial insemination. Breeding herds are commonly housed in indoor systems with or without outdoor access, or sometimes in entirely outdoor systems. In indoor systems, boars are housed individually and gestating gilts/sows may be housed in individual stalls or group pens. In outdoor systems, gilts and sows are kept in paddocks, and boars may be kept separate or housed with the gilts/sows.

Most pigs in Australia are housed in conventional indoor systems. In conventional systems, for the first five days after mating, gilts/sows are usually confined in mating stalls (similar to a sow stall) before being returned to their group housing. The Australian pig industry has committed to voluntarily phasing out sow stalls after the first 5 days following mating (where the sow is confined to a mating stall) in favour of group housing for pregnant sows. It is estimated that around 80% of sows in Australia are group housed during their pregnancy, unlike sows in other countries who can be confined in sow stalls for the entirety of their pregnancy.

In outdoor systems, at mating, gilts/sows are brought into larger mating pens for natural mating or artificially inseminated after which they are then released back into a pen or paddock.

Towards the end of pregnancy, sows in conventional farming systems are moved into farrowing crates to give birth.

The farrowing section of a piggery houses sows due to farrow (give birth) as well as sows with piglets up to the point of weaning. The farrowing crate separates the sow from her piglets but allows piglets access to the sow's teats so that they can drink. A sow may be confined in a farrowing crate for up to 4 weeks. During these periods they suffer immense frustration and inability to exhibit their innate behaviours such as nest building. In extensive outdoor systems, pregnant sows are moved to farrowing huts that are located in a smaller outdoor area or paddock. In a farrowing hut, the sow is not separated from her piglets and is able to build a nest prior to giving birth as bedding is often provided.

Mating stalls, sow stalls and farrowing crates confine pigs so that they cannot turn around and can only take a short step forward or backwards. When confined like this, pigs are unable to perform highly motivated behaviours such as nesting at farrowing or foraging.

In the first few days of life, piglets undergo several husbandry procedures such as teeth clipping, tail docking and ear notching.

Some piggeries that operate exclusively as breeder farms, only house breeding animals. Any progeny (their piglets) born are removed from the piggery at, or just after, weaning and sent to farms where they grow out.

Piglets after weaning can be housed in indoor, semi-outdoor or outdoor (free range) systems.

In conventional indoor systems, piglets after weaning are moved into group pens and moved between different sheds depending on the stage of production. The majority of pigs raised commercially live in barren systems where they are kept indoors their entire lifetime. As a highly intelligent animal, with strong behavioural motivations, living without enrichment or things to do has a detrimental impact on their mental wellbeing. Pigs are likely to exhibit unwanted behaviours that have physical health implications, such as tail biting. To address this, routine husbandry procedures are undertaken (tail docking, teeth clipping, castration) rather than actively managing the environment with more inputs such as bedding and enrichment.

Piglets in semi-outdoor systems are moved into large sheds/barns with bedding such as straw or rice hulls, that may also have access to an outdoor pen area. Piglets in outdoor free-range systems are kept outdoors in paddocks with access to shelter with bedding.

When pigs reach market weight they are transported on trucks from the farm to an abattoir for slaughter. Market weight may vary from 45kg to 110kg (at around 6 months old).

Pigs are commonly slaughtered using either gas (carbon dioxide) or electrical stunning systems. Electrical stunning systems are used in smaller abattoirs as they require individual handling and restraint of pigs. Gas stunning systems are used in larger abattoirs and allow for group stunning. Once unconscious, pigs are then bled out to cause death prior to regaining consciousness.

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