

# *Will the EU manage to phase out the surgical castration of pigs by 2018?*

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an overview by the FVE



Federation of  
Veterinarians of Europe

# Basic Ethical Considerations

Any stress and pain we force on animals needs strong ethical justification

Castrating pigs has been justified until recently by the fact that boar taint of the meat of male pigs may impair its usability as food



## Traditional pig castration

= a surgical procedure without any  
pain relief

# Millions of pigs/year without pain relief - Need for change



**Ethical considerations**

**Societal pressure**

**New insight and research**

**Development of alternatives**



[www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)

# European Declaration about surgical castration (2010)

1. From 1 January **2012** in all cases with prolonged analgesia and/or anesthesia
2. From 1 January **2018** surgical castration is no longer allowed

**Voluntary commitment to phase out surgical castration by 2018**

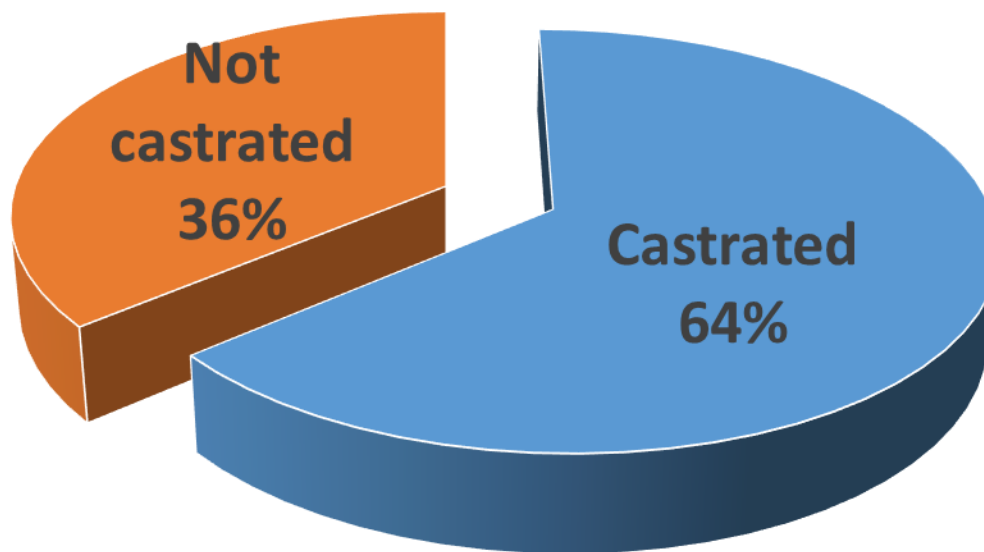
‘Soft Law’ building on a coalition of stakeholders





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# FVE survey in 2015: % of pigs castrated vs. not castrated (24 countries)



# Percentage of pigs surgically castrated



[www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)

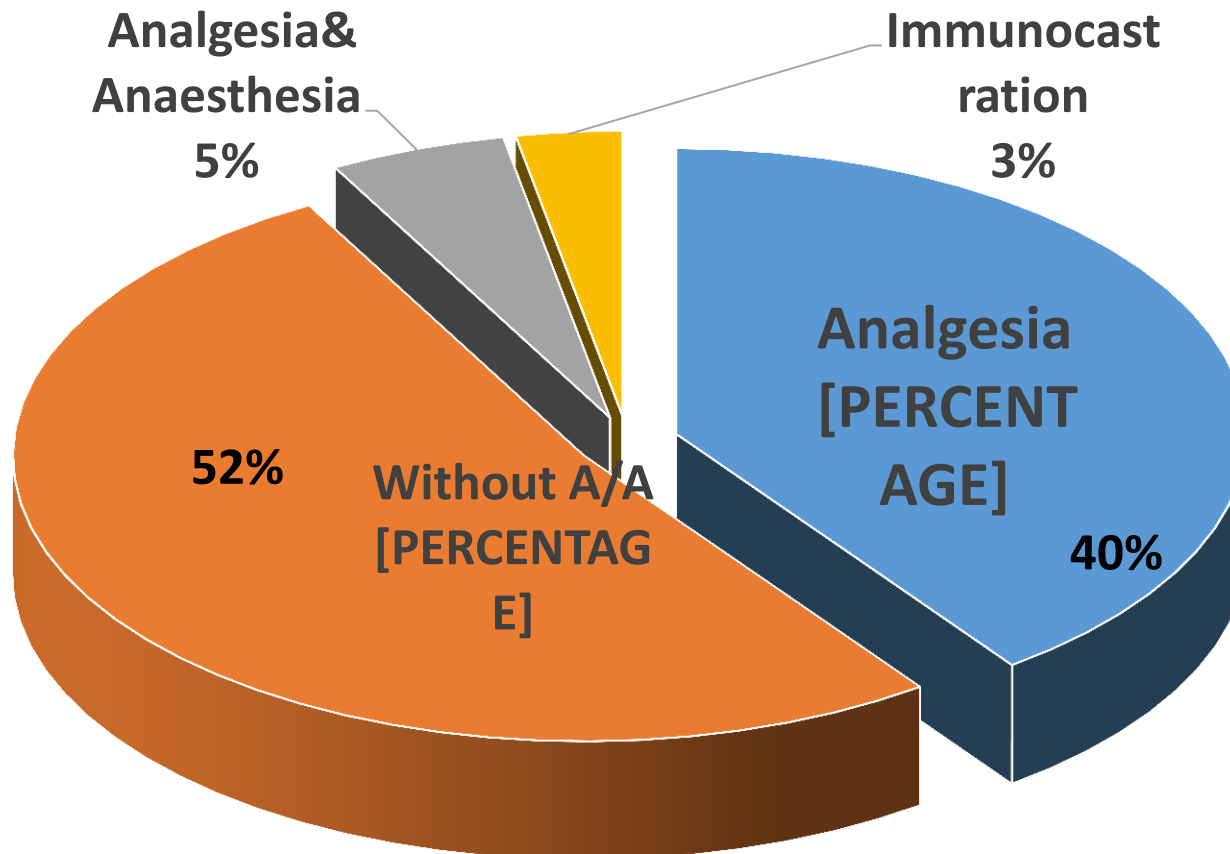
- **Traditionally no surgical castration:** Ireland, UK, Spain and Portugal
- **Between 90 and 20%:** Netherlands, Belgium Germany and France
- **More than 90%:** All the other countries

= 2/3 of male pigs in EU are still being castrated surgically

# FVE survey in 2015: % of different castration methods



[www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)



In 2010: 79% without A/A = only -27% in 7 years



# Method of castration



[www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)

- **Castration with analgesia & anaesthesia**; main method in Norway & Switzerland, partly used Netherlands & Sweden
- **Castration with analgesia**: 7 countries > 70%
- **Immunocastration**: minimal in most countries, highest in Belgium (20%)
- **Castration without a/a**: in 9 countries > 50-90% of piglets

# Alternatives



1. **Surgical castration with anaesthesia/analgesia**
  2. **Raising entire males**
  3. **Immunization against GnRH**
  4. Sperm selection
  5. Reduce boar taint by genetic selection, nutrition, management
  6. Detection at the slaughter line (e-nose or professional sniffers)
- etc

**Ethical consideration: As soon as alternatives to surgical castration are available, the ethical justification has become obsolete**

# Pro's/Con's of alternatives

	Pro's	Con's
<b>Surgical castration with anaesthesia/analgesia</b>	pain relief during and after surgery	restraining pigs=stress local anaesthesia is painful it is still an amputation
<b>Raising entire males</b>	no surgical procedure no pain due to surgery no amputation	injuries due to animals' fighting soft fat boar taint
<b>Immunization against GnRH</b>	the least stress no pain no amputation	poor acceptance due to wrong perception cost of vaccine

**From the animal welfare point of view, immunocastration is superior. The opinion that immunocastration is against organic principles is scientifically not justifiable**



# Positive welfare impact

# But minor to serious extra cost

## Obstacles:

- extra cost involved in using a/a (not paid back by consumer);
- extra work load;
- lack of acceptance slaughterhouses (entire pigs);
- perceived lack of market acceptance (immunocast.);
- problems with raising entire males,
- boar taint in meat
- lack of agreed and practical anaesthesia/analgesia protocols

# CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ Deadline 1 Jan 2012 is not met in most countries
- ✓ Progress has been made,
  - ✓ Less male pigs castrated without A/A: -27% 2010-2015
  - ✓ Increased use of analgesia: 2015: 40%
  - ✓ Entire males gone up in some countries
- ✓ **Need to develop effective analgesia/anaesthesia protocols**
- ✓ Clear positive welfare benefits, but at a cost
- ✓ **Goal:** find practical and affordable solution accepted by the market

**Full report on Porcine Health  
Management Journal – open Access**

*Will the EU manage to phase out all the surgical castration of pigs by 2018?*

**No**, except if we all make it a top priority today

**Although**, (slow) progress is continuously being made. However, there are huge differences from country to country

Only 6 countries have set national deadlines

# The ethical justification...

.... for castrating pigs (especially without anaesthesia/analgesia) is obsolete

....since there are alternatives with doubtless practicability!!!



Thanks you for your  
attention