



Report of the 269th Session

Thursday 10 March 2011, 10.00 11.00 hrs
Room LOW N 3.2 – European Parliament, Strasbourg

1. Introductory remarks

Intergroup delegation meeting on animal transport

A further Intergroup delegation meeting on animal transport has been held on Wednesday 9 March 2011 to discuss about initiatives that will be taken to put pressure on the Commission for an urgent revision of the animal transport Regulation.

2. European declaration on alternatives to the surgical castration of pigs

Dr. Michel Courat, Policy Officer Farm Animals, Eurogroup for Animals spoke about the content and goals of the European declaration on alternatives to the surgical castration of pigs http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/farm/initiatives_en.htm

The surgical castration of pigs is an animal welfare concern. It is a painful intervention even when performed on very young animals. Castration is practiced to avoid the development of undesirable sexual or aggressive behaviour and to prevent the development of boar taint, since the expected taste and odour of pig meat is a very important marketing aspect.

Different alternatives to surgical castration are already being applied in and outside the EU and several countries have already committed themselves to the long term phasing out of surgical castration of pigs.

Since different approaches within the European Union could create problems for the functioning of the Internal Market and also for exports to third countries, a European wide approach and mutual recognition will facilitate trade in pig meat.

The European Declaration which has been adopted in December 2010 is a voluntary commitment that brings together major players and stakeholders in the pig meat chain who commit to deliver on clear measurable actions over the next seven years to definitively stop the cruel and very painful surgical castration.

Eurogroup and other animal welfare organisations have already signed the declaration.

The main actions foreseen in the declaration are:

- By 1 January 2012, surgical castration of pigs, if carried out, shall be performed with prolonged analgesia and/or anaesthesia with methods mutually recognised.
- By 1 January 2018, surgical castration of pigs should be abandoned.

To support a sustainable and competitive pig meat chain in the EU a **European Partnership on pig castration**, supported and funded by the European Commission should be established in order to:

1. ensure the acceptance of products from pigs not surgically castrated by the authorities and the consumers in the European Union but also in third country markets
2. to agree on a common understanding of boar taint
3. perform or coordinate research and development and achieve results on:
 - a. Mutually recognised methods for the assessment of boar taint;
 - b. European recognised reference methods for the measurement of each of the compounds responsible for boar taint;
 - c. Rapid detection methods for boar taint at slaughter plants;
 - d. Reduction of boar taint compounds by pig breeding and/or management and feeding;
 - e. The production systems and management of entire males during rearing, transport and at slaughter, to minimise sexual and aggressive behaviours.
 - f. Alternatives to surgical castration for traditional productions requiring heavier pigs

Bureau Members

President:

Carl Schlyter MEP

Vice-Presidents:

Kriton Arsenis MEP

Jacqueline Foster MEP

Elisabeth Jeggle MEP

Dan Jørgensen MEP

Jörg Leichtfried MEP

Kartika Liotard MEP

David Martin MEP

Cristiana Muscardini MEP

Sirpa Pietikäinen MEP

Raül Romeva i Rueda MEP

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Established in 1983

The costs for implementing the end of surgical castration shall be shared between the economic actors of the chain.

An annual public report shall assess the progress in the development and effectiveness of the tools mentioned above as well as the costs for implementing the end of surgical castration and their sharing between the economic actors of the chain.

It is important to consider that even though this declaration has no legal obligation, the stakeholders who signed it consider that it will be stronger and much quicker to put in practice than legislation.

Alternatives to surgical pig castration are already available such as immunocastration. This system is underused at the moment and it is often still badly considered by the farmers even though it is immediately available, has been proven to be safe on millions of pigs in Australia and New Zealand, and is cost effective and animal welfare friendly. Immunocastration would also be very helpful to apply on bigger pigs that are used for ham production.

The role of the European Parliament

It is essential for this declaration to have a full support from the European Parliament. Michel Courat called on the Members present to ask stakeholders in the pork chain on national level to endorse and sign the Declaration. The more stakeholders will sign the quicker it will be to reach the set goals.

Questions and debate

Gianni Vattimo (ALDE, IT) inquired if it would be possible for the Intergroup to prepare a voting lists for animal welfare related reports that would be voted on in plenary. Carl Schlyter replied that Eurogroup for Animals already sends out support letters whenever there are important animal welfare related initiatives in plenary.

Animal welfare friendly pig production

Thierry Schweitzer, an Alsatian pig farmer, pork butcher and winner of the French Trophy for Sustainable Farming in 2010 spoke about his alternative way of farming pigs. The business started 15 years ago on his father's farm in the village of Schleithal. At the time the Alsatian consumers association and the SPA -Société Protectrice des Animaux were encouraging farmers to find sustainable ways of animal rearing which guarantee consumers' health, animal welfare and the protection of the environment.

The main principles of his farming practice:

- Pigs receive cereal and mineral based feed without the use of GMOS and antibiotics as growth stimulants.
- Freedom of movement for animals is a key feature for the whole life of a pig. The animals are stabled on straw in group housing
- The sows are never tied up and have straw under them in farrowing crates
- The piglets stay with their mother at least four weeks
- Neither teeth clipping nor tail docking is applied systematically
- Using straw as litter reduces the environmental and olfactive impact when the manure is spread in the fields

There is no systematisation of any kind of practice. Thus antibiotics have to be applied sometimes in order to deal with diseases and tooth clipping is carried out when needed. The animals are regularly monitored in order to react in the most sensible way when problems appear. The farm must have a certain size but it should not turn into a pig factory.

Product marketing

An essential aspect of the business is the processing of meat and the marketing of the produce which is moving towards becoming 100 % organic. 100 ha of Thierry Schweitzer's farm are given over to organic cereal production for feed. An attractive brand logo helps to promote the marketing message. Pig meat is processed into Thierry Schweitzer ham, bacon and other produce in a 1000 m² plant which includes also a shop.

The market is very much open for this kind of produce as more and more consumers want to know the origin of the products they buy. However, the final product which people buy in shops must be as nice as any other product. Therefore, it is important that the ingredients which are used are good and that the intrinsic quality is upheld. This is why the Thierry Schweitzer business model gives so much importance the processing of the own pig meat.

Six other farmers have become involved and are using the same set of specifications. Thierry Schweitzer's customers are also supermarkets like Auchan, Cora and Système U in France. Lately, a major supermarket chain in Paris has shown an interest to sell animal welfare friendly pig meat and processed products. This will mean a further development.

A lot of Thierry Schweitzer products are being sold on open shelves or open displays as the products are packaged. The packaging is important for the communication and advertising part. Several awards have raised the profile of the company and this has an impact on subsequent marketing.

Consumer information is crucial. Civil society is waking up to farming techniques and agriculture and it is important that they are behind the choices. This will allow defending the sustainable rearing techniques of animals. Many small farmers will not be able to survive unless they move on to this kind of approach.

Questions and debate

Anna Rosbach (ECR, DK) asked if Thierry Schweitzer would be allowed to slaughter his animals on farm. He replied that he would send his animals to a slaughterhouse as he had not yet the facilities to slaughter on farm. He would however work on it as it would be a further added value for his brand.

Janusz Wojciechowski declared that he would be involved in all actions aiming at banning the painful practices of surgical pig castration. He mentioned the conference on factory pig farming which he had co-organised some weeks ago in the European Parliament and stressed that factory farming gives a very bad image to the business particularly when the pigs are being reared in atrocious conditions. He congratulated Thierry Schweitzer for his way of rearing pigs which is becoming more and more popular and should be an example for the sector. He inquired about the kind of support the CAP could give to sustainable pig farming practices. **Thierry Schweitzer** stressed not to be an expert on the CAP. However, the future CAP should be developed on the basis of common sense. His farm has grown without any kind of subsidy thanks to a lot of commitment and hard work. To reduce costs and prices pig farmers increase the number of animals. However if consumers are properly informed about the production methods they are also willing to pay more. It has also to do with a sustainable lifestyle people are looking for.

Nick Griffin (NI, UK) spoke about the practice of tail docking stressing that it would not be sufficiently considered as a problem. He has reared pigs on a small scale for twenty years but never had problems with tail biting. It is something which is correlated with intensive farming practices. He inquired about the speakers' position on tail docking. **Carl Schlyter (Greens/EFA, SE)** confirmed that there is a clear link between tail biting and intensive farming. In the barren and cramped environments of intensive pig stables the animals have nothing to play with other than each tails.

Sabine Ohm from Provieh <http://www.provieh.de/>, a German animal welfare organisation for farm animals said that immunocastration with Improvac is not spreading faster in German because of two major reasons: the retailers are very afraid that some radical groups who are against livestock farming could stir up a hormone scandal even though hormones are not injected in the pigs. The second reason is that farmer organisations don't want to become dependent on one pharmaceutical product for which Pfizer has a patent for ten years. **Michel Courat** confirmed her statements about the fear of possible initiatives from extremist groups crying out a hormone scandal. However, the attitude of supermarkets in Belgium is different. Colruyt has decided starting from January 2011 to sell meat from pigs that have been castrated with Imrovac. He agreed with the problem of Pfizer's monopole position concerning immunocastration. Eurogroup for Animals considers that Imrovac has a huge advantage as a temporary measure that is immediately available and animal welfare friendly. However, it should not be considered as a long term solution.

Sabine Ohm supported Michel Courat's remark about the need to get everybody on board concerning the European Declaration on piglet castration, especially the Dutch delegation. At the recent meeting in Brussels they refused to sign the declaration and be part of the European Partnership. This is very worrying because the Netherlands are among the pioneering countries in this field. Their argument is that piglet castration should not become a competitiveness issue between countries which would lead to protectionist measures. She encouraged MEPs to convince the Netherlands for getting on board well as all the other countries that have not yet signed.

Sabine Ohm asked if Thierry Schweitzer would castrate male pigs and if not what percentage of the meat would be boar tainted. What would he envisage to solve this animal welfare problem? **Thierry Schweitzer** said that he would surgically castrate pigs on the farm using aesthetic or analgesic. Lately also immunocastration has been

tried out. He had however certain reservations when it comes to the harmlessness of the product and did not like the idea of the monopoly position Improvac from Pfizer still has on the market.

Carl Schlyter pointed out that one of the reasons for Thierry Schweitzer's economic success would be the processing of lower value parts of the pigs. This is a good example of local food development which allows larger profit margins. **Thierry Schweitzer** replied that meat represents only 15-20% of a pig carcass. The processed food part is fundamental when it comes to getting the most out of a carcass. Communication is essential when it comes to marketing processed pig produce. The only way of developing this type of farm is take information to the consumers as they can make choices. Consumers tend to forget that they have to show responsibility for a certain number of their choices. Carl Schlyter inquired further if Mr Schweitzer could measure happiness in his animals and not just absence of suffering. **Thierry Schweitzer** replied that many people would ask him this question. He would not be able to say if their animals are happy but would make sure that they can live a more or less species adapted life.

Call of support for a draft motion for a resolution on the surgical castration of piglets

To provide an official EP support to the European Declaration on Alternatives to the surgical castration of pigs, the Intergroup suggested tabling a motion for a resolution on the surgical castration of piglets according to the rule 110(2) of the rules of procedure. For this the support of 40 MEPs is needed.

Carl Schlyter called on the members present to support the draft motion for a resolution with their signature and thanked them in advance.

Closing remarks

The next intergroup meeting is scheduled for Thursday 7 April 2011. It will focus on live feather plucking and foie gras production.

ATTENDANCE**Members of the European Parliament (10)**

Auken, Margrete	Greens/EFA	AT
Griffin, Nick	NI	UK
Leichtfried, Jörg (Vice-President)	S&D	AT
McGuinness, Mairead	EPP	IR
Rosbach, Anna	EFD	DK
Sârbu, Daciana (Vice-President)	S&D	GR
Schlyter, Carl (President)	Greens/EFA	SE
Soullie, Catherine (Vice-President)	EPP	FR
Vattimo, Gianni	ALDE	IT
Wojciechowski, Janusz (Vice-President)	ECR	PL

Assistants and Trainees to Members of the European Parliament (10)

Cummings, John	Assistant to Mrs Sârbu (S&D, RO)
EL Bennich, Nadia	Assistant to Ms Hirsch (ALDE, DE)
Jenkins, Cassi	Assistant to Mr Howitt (S&D, UK)
Letters, Chris	Trainee to Ms Lambert (Greens/EFA, UK)
Müller, Anne	Assistant to Dr. Schnellhardt (EPP, DE)
Pahlen, Marita	Assistant to Mr Schlyter (Greens/EFA, SE)
Pena, Judith	Assistant to Ms Soullie (EPP, FR)
Valtanen, Aino	Assistant to Ms Pietikäinen (EPP, FI)
Vogelsang, Niels	Assistant to Mr Jorgensen (S&D, DK)
Weber, Johannes	Assistant to Ms Jeggle (EPP, DE)

Guest Speakers and Observers (8)

Courat, Michel	Eurogroup for Animals
Dalton, Dan	Political Advisor, ECR Group
Gautrais, Bruno	DG SANCO, European Commission
Majerczyk, Magdalena	ECR Political Advisor
Miczki, Tamara	DG PRES, European Parliament
Ohm, Sabine	Provieh
Schoch, Liliane	Comurnat
Schweitzer, Thierry	Alsatian Pig farmer and pork producer

Intergroup Secretariat (1)

Erlar, Andreas	Political Officer, Eurogroup for Animals
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