



ROOTING FOR PIGS!

Compassion in World Farming believes that all farm animals should be reared in an environment where they can carry out their natural behaviours and have a good standard of life.

Thanks to the work of Compassion in World Farming and other animal welfare groups, animals are now recognised in EU law as “sentient beings” (which means they can suffer and feel pain, and can also enjoy a sense of well-being).

We must ensure that all farms provide an appropriate environment for the animals reared on them. This includes making sure that they have suitable food, water, shelter and protection. To prevent suffering, it is also essential that animals can move around freely and carry out their natural behaviours.

Compassion in World Farming has, for many years, campaigned for improved conditions on pig farms. Much of the pig industry in the EU is highly intensive. This is the case in the Republic of Ireland, where the vast majority of pigs are reared indoors on factory farms. All too often, the conditions are crowded and barren.

Pigs need to be able to root

One of Compassion in World Farming - Ireland's most important campaigns at present is to ensure that all young pigs being reared for meat (called “fattening pigs”) are given a sufficient quantity of straw or other suitable materials to root in.

Rooting is a very important behaviour for pigs - they naturally love to dig in the ground and explore with their sensitive noses, and they suffer if they are forced to live in an environment where there is nothing for them to root in. **The provision of rooting material is crucial to the good welfare of pigs.**

The EU Pigs Directive (which lays down, in law, the minimum conditions for pigs) requires that: “pigs must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities, such as straw, hay, wood, sawdust, mushroom compost, peat or a mixture of such ...”. Irish law contains a similar requirement.

Thus, not only is rooting material *necessary* for the well-being of pigs, but it is also a *legal requirement* in EU and Irish law. Unfortunately, this law is widely ignored and the majority of Irish fattening pigs are reared in barren pens with no material to root in.



Irish fattening pigs in a barren pen with no rooting material

Some farmers, instead of providing proper rooting material, give the pigs “toys” such as lengths of plastic pipe or chains. But these do not meet the pigs’ need to carry out natural rooting behaviour. Although such toys are acceptable as a supplement to rooting material, they are not a substitute for it. Furthermore, these toys do not comply with the legal requirement for farms to provide a sufficient quantity of suitable rooting material.

We welcomed that the welfare of pigs was highlighted by the popular RTÉ TV farming programme, *Ear to the Ground*, in January. This included film footage of inside an intensive pig farm, and an interview with Compassion in World Farming - Ireland's Director, Mary-Anne Bartlett.

Compassion in World Farming - Ireland has written to Agriculture Minister Brendan Smith, pointing out that many pig farms in the Republic of Ireland are in breach of EU and Irish law by failing to provide suitable rooting materials for fattening pigs. We have asked the Minister to explain how his Department intends to address this issue.



A better environment, with straw

More on pigs ⇒

Nothing to do except bite each others' tails

It is highly unnatural for young pigs (fattening pigs) to be forced to live in the type of environment described on the front page, where conditions are barren and there is no material for the pigs to root in.

Not surprisingly, pigs reared in barren pens may start to behave abnormally. They turn to the only thing of interest in their bleak environment, and that is the tails of other pigs. They start to bite at each others' tails and this can result in serious wounds.

Abnormal tail biting behaviour is a widespread problem on intensive pig farms, and it is often a sign that something is wrong with the pigs' environment. The science shows that a key factor leading to tail biting is lack of material for pigs to root in.

If there are tail biting problems on a barren farm, then clearly the first thing the farmer should do is to provide the pigs with rooting materials. This is, in any case, a legal requirement (as explained on the front page). But it is not the action that many farmers take.



Irish free-range organic pigs, with tails!

Instead of giving pigs the rooting materials they need, the most common way of dealing with abnormal tail biting behaviour is to cut off part of the pigs' tails. It is shocking that 95% of pigs in Ireland are tail-docked, according to a Report on tail biting by the European Food Safety Authority.

In our letter to Agriculture Minister Smith, we detailed our concerns about routine tail-docking of pigs, and asked what action his Department is taking to ensure that all pig farmers comply with the law on this issue.

Breeding sows have welfare problems too

Sadly, it is not just fattening pigs that suffer in the unsuitable environment of the intensive pig farm.

There are problems too for their mothers, the breeding sows that produce one litter after another of piglets to be fattened for meat.



Irish sows in stalls

Sow stalls

Compassion in World Farming welcomed the EU decision to ban narrow stalls for pregnant sows after the first 4 weeks of their pregnancies. Instead, sows must be kept in

groups in larger pens where they can move around freely. The sow stall ban comes into effect throughout the EU in 2013.

In the meantime, there are still sows on farms in the Republic of Ireland that are confined in sow stalls for one complete pregnancy after another.

Farrowing crates

There are also welfare problems for sows around the time of farrowing (giving birth).

The farrowing crate remains legal in the EU, including in the Republic of Ireland, where it is used on virtually all intensive pig farms.

The farrowing crate is so narrow that the sow cannot even turn around. There is no room for her to properly mother her piglets.



An Irish sow in a farrowing crate with her piglets

A pregnant sow is shut into a farrowing crate a few days before she gives birth. She gives birth in the farrowing crate and remains there with her piglets for about 4 weeks, until they are taken away to be fattened for meat.

In the wild, sows build a large nest of grass, twigs, leaves and branches to have their piglets in. As a sow gets near to the time of giving birth, she has a strong need to nest-build. On farms, we believe that breeding pigs should be provided with accommodation that allows this natural farrowing behaviour.

There are more humane alternatives to farrowing crates, such as farrowing pens. In these, the sow has more room and a warm comfortable area with bedding material where she can suckle her piglets, with low level bars to protect the piglets from crushing when the sow lies down.

Compassion in World Farming is campaigning at EU level for farrowing crates to be made illegal and for humane alternatives to be used instead.

‘FUR OR AGAINST?’



Photo © Compassion in World Farming

Mary-Anne Bartlett (Director, Compassion in World Farming - Ireland) with the Fur or Against? group at their school in Tralee

Left to right: Mark, Kilian, Sinéad, Fiona, Emma, Diarmuid, Mary-Anne & John

Very well done to a group of Transition Year students from Mercy Secondary School, Mounthawk, Tralee in Co. Kerry, who have formed a *Fur or Against?* group for their Young Social Innovators Project, highlighting the welfare problems for mink and foxes on Irish fur farms.

The group has put a huge amount of effort into their project, including collecting over a thousand ‘ban fur farming’ signatures, having an educational street stand in Tralee, and meeting with senior officials of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food in Dublin.

In a letter, Minister Smith assured the group that he had noted their “genuine concerns on the matter particularly with regard to the framing of legislation in the context of drafting the new Animal Health and Welfare Bill.”

In March, Mary-Anne had great pleasure in accepting an invitation from the *Fur or Against?* group to join them in making presentations about welfare problems on fur farms to other students at the school.

For more about this creative and imaginative project, visit the *Fur or Against?* Bebo site at: www.bebo.com/FurorAgainst

An edited version of the following letter from Compassion in World Farming - Ireland was published in *The Sunday Times* on 22nd March 2009

SLAUGHTER SUFFERING

I write in response to the claim that slaughter without stunning is “humane and efficient” (Letter, *Sunday Times*, 15th March 2009). Whilst respecting religious views, on this matter we must be guided by science.

The European Food Safety Authority’s Scientific Panel for Animal Health and Welfare, which is made up of highly respected scientists, recommends that: “all animals which are slaughtered should be adequately stunned in a humane way, whenever possible, so as to avoid poor welfare in the period before unconsciousness ensues.”

The Panel’s report states there is a high risk that animals feel extreme pain during the cutting of the throat, and says that: “During the period when the animal, whose throat has been cut, is still conscious, serious welfare problems are highly likely to occur since the animal can feel anxiety, pain, distress and other suffering.” Time to insensibility was judged to be up to 2 minutes for cattle.

Veterinarians have also come out against slaughter without stunning: the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe says that it finds the practice “unacceptable under any circumstances” from an ethical and animal welfare viewpoint.

Compassion in World Farming is satisfied that the scientific evidence overwhelmingly shows that slaughter without stunning is not humane, and therefore we advocate that all animals should be stunned before they are killed.

From: Mary-Anne Bartlett,
Director, Compassion in World Farming - Ireland

ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE BILL

We understand that the proposed new Animal Health and Welfare Bill may now be published in late spring or summer 2009.

In January, Compassion in World Farming - Ireland had a meeting with Green Party Senator, Dan Boyle. At this, he said that the Green Party continues to be committed to addressing the issue of fur farming by means of the Animal Health and Welfare Bill.

Back in 2005, Dan Boyle (then a Green Party TD) published a Bill to ban fur farming that attracted the support of all parties except Fianna Fáil and the PDs. The Bill was defeated by 67 votes to 50.

DONATIONS

Instead of set subscription rates, we now ask our supporters to give an occasional donation of an amount that they can afford.

We are aware that the recession means these are difficult times, and we will have to work hard to ensure that welfare standards for farm animals continue to improve.

Any donation, no matter how small, will help our work.

Thank you so much

SUCCESSES TO DATE IN IRELAND AND IN THE EU



PIGS - EU SOW STALL BAN

Tethering of pregnant sows became illegal in the EU in 2006. Keeping pregnant sows in narrow stalls (*left*) after the first 4 weeks of pregnancy became illegal in the EU on new pig units in 2003, and will be illegal on all pig units from 1st January 2013.



LAYING HENS - EU BATTERY CAGE BAN

Barren battery cages (*right*) became illegal on new laying hen units in 2003, and will be illegal on all laying hen units from 1st January 2012.

COMPULSORY EGG LABELLING IN THE EU

All boxes of eggs must be labelled to show the method of production ("Eggs from caged hens", "Free range eggs", "Barn eggs" or "Organic") since 1st January 2004.



VEAL CALVES - EU VEAL CRATE BAN

Rearing calves in veal crates (narrow boxes for individual calves, *see right*) became illegal in the EU in 2007.

EU SUBSIDIES FOR CATTLE EXPORTS TO MIDDLE EAST SCRAPPED

EU subsidies that fuelled the export of live cattle from EU countries to the Middle East for slaughter or further fattening were scrapped in December 2005. As a result, Irish cattle shipments to the Middle East have now virtually ceased.

ANIMALS RECOGNISED IN EU LAW AS "SENTIENT BEINGS"

An EU Protocol came into force in 1999, recognising that animals are sentient beings and requiring the EU and Member States to pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals when formulating and implementing Community policies.

DEER VELVETTING BANNED IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Deer velvetting was banned in the Republic of Ireland in 1994. This is the removal of deers' antlers at the soft velvetted stage, when the antlers are highly sensitive. The dried material is used in some countries as a tonic or aphrodisiac.

ELECTRO-IMMOBILISATION BANNED IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The use of electro-immobilisation to restrain live animals became illegal in the Republic of Ireland in September 2007. Electro-immobilisation involves passing an electrical current through an animal to "freeze" its muscles, thereby holding the fully conscious animal in a stationary position whilst certain procedures are carried out.

COMPASSION IN WORLD FARMING - IRELAND ON FARM ANIMAL WELFARE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Irish Government formed a Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council, which includes a representative of Compassion in World Farming - Ireland. The first meeting of the Council was held in 2002. Compassion in World Farming - Ireland continues to play a very active role on this Council.