

## Boar castration cuts into farmer profits

I am a Dutch pig truck driver. I was recently shown a copy of your article about pig castration, titled "Grocers are asked to switch to boar meat: Animal welfare activists target pig castration," published in the *Manitoba Co-operator* March 25, 2010.

My father is a pig trader and I have grown up in the business. Our transport company delivers slaughter boars on a weekly basis to Westfort Vlees in Gorinchem, the Netherlands. This slaughterhouse started accepting boars already back in 2007. Vion is going to start accepting boars and detect for boar taint at its plant as well in the upcoming year. The boars I transport are often from the breeds Landrace, Pietran, Yorkshire, and Topigs and are on average 100 kg live weight when we bring them to slaughter.

I can understand the initial concern Canadians may have about the idea of no longer castrating male pigs and thus wanted to write to you now. Almost all the supermarket chains here have switched over

completely to selling intact boar meat, and there have not been any problems or customer complaints.

At Westfort Vlees, like some other slaughterhouses here and also Toennies in Germany that have switched over, they use professional "sniffers" to heat up a small section of each boar carcass to detect for boar taint.

At Westfort they have been doing this since 2007. Only about two per cent of the boar carcasses have emitted boar taint, and they are separated and prepared into pre-cooked products. The cooking completely eliminates any odour.

The way I see it, it is beyond just animal welfare, but also welfare for people in the pig industry. First of all, castration was never a nice job for anyone to do. Most farmers do not like causing any extra kind of pain to their animals if they can help it. Let's admit — castration is painful and not pleasant to do.

But more interestingly now, is the economic benefit to the farmer of keeping his male pigs intact. An intact male pig has a much better feed conversion,

thus requires less feed to reach slaughter weight.

Less feed means also less production of manure, which is good for the environment and also for our pockets because we have to pay to dispose of all the manure. There are also no costs for castrating the pigs, no employee to perform the procedure, no equipment, no medicine for the wounds that become infected. Dutch pig farmers are saving around 12 euro (about C\$15) per male pig.

I don't think Canada should shy away from this idea, or discredit the animal welfare organizations that are making the effort to spread the message across the ocean as to what we have achieved here. Some activists may want more people to stop eating meat, but why would that stop anyone from at least hearing out an idea that would indeed decrease animal pain but also increase profits for the farmer?

I recommend interviewing Dutch pig farmers, truckers and slaughterers who are directly involved. We also used to think it was a crazy idea to stop castrating our male piglets, but over the past few years

we realized that we may have been crazier assuming all this time that it was a must. Those animal activists aren't all so crazy as one thinks either. In Europe, we actually often find common ground.

*C. The Netherlands*

## So-called "activists" are actually realists

My name is Dr. Kees Scheepens, pig veterinarian and pig farmer from the Netherlands. I was in Manitoba March 25 to give a talk at the University of Manitoba on the phasing out of gestation crates. Now I am sent the article "Animal Welfare Activists Target Pig Castration," which published in the March 25 issue of the *Manitoba Co-operator*.

It is surprising to me, as it was on the topic "group housing," that there is so much misunderstanding regarding pig welfare.

Public opinion, not science, is determining in this world what is acceptable and what is not. MAFRI's Robyn Harte, quoted by reporter Ron Friesen, is suggesting genetic

differences between pigs in Canada and Europe. This, of course, is not true since most of the breeding companies have nucleus farms on both continents with constant exchange of genes.

So, please do not feel offended in any way, but what you call "animal welfare activists" are better described as sensitive "animal welfare realists." They really know what is going on in Europe; they know what they are talking about.

We, as responsible farmers, take the concerns of consumers seriously and respond to that in a professional way by phasing out crates and not castrating. The future might bring even more.

Kindest regards from the Netherlands,

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