



PIG CASTRATION

Q: Why are male piglets castrated?

A: In almost all European countries, male piglets are still castrated **to prevent** the possible occurrence of **an unpleasant smell when heating the meat** (boar taint). Castration also prevents male pigs to become sexually mature and to express sexual behaviours such as mounting pen mates.

Q: What is boar taint?

A: **Boar taint is a penetrating unpleasant smell** (and accompanying flavour) that can occur in the meat from male pigs when cooked.

Q: Which percentage of pigs have the deviant smell known as boar taint?

A: **Most pigs are slaughtered at live weights lower than 120 kg.** The prevalence of **boar taint** is then on average **lower than five percent**. Pigs slaughtered at higher weights or kept in alternative systems like organic farming have a higher prevalence of boar taint.

Q: Why, if castration prevents boar taint, should this practice be stopped?

A: As **surgical castration is a very painful procedure**, and as **there are more humane alternatives**, objections to the castration of male piglets are increasing. Additionally, the prevalence of boar taint is at present much lower than what has previously reported by the slaughter industry, and can be further decreased through breeding, feeding and improved housing conditions.

Q: What are the advantages of stopping surgical castration?

A: The main advantage for both piglets and farmers is **improved welfare**, for example not having to undergo or carry out castration which causes pain to the pigs. Stopping the castration of pigs also leads to sustainable practices and lower costs because the pigs grow better and require less feed.

Q: What are the available alternatives to painful surgical castration?

A: Keeping entire males (boars)

Pigs do not need to be castrated. Many EU countries, like Ireland, the UK, Spain, and more recently the Netherlands raise entire males (boars). This is possible as the prevalence of boar taint is very low, and pig farmers in these countries have acquired a lot of expertise on how to manage boars. The rearing of all pigs requires adequate management and housing conditions that fulfill their specific needs (i.e. sufficient and balanced feeding, sufficient and adequate enrichment material, enough space, careful husbandry). This is even more critical when rearing boars. However, it is possible to achieve good results while minimising welfare problems.

Keeping entire males is our preferred solution as it respects the physical integrity of the animals. However, this may not be always possible. For instance, for pigs that are slaughtered at higher live weights (up to 180-200 kg) for the production of traditional cured hams and other special products. In this case, vaccination against boar taint can be used.

Vaccination against boar taint

Vaccination against boar taint (also sometimes called immunocastration) is a method whereby pigs receive two doses of a vaccine that temporarily blocks puberty. If the vaccination protocol is carried out correctly, the production of the substances responsible for boar taint in the meat is prevented.

Surgical castration with anaesthesia and analgesia

Some countries have introduced legislation that prohibits surgical castration without anaesthesia. As a consequence, in those countries piglets are now castrated with local or general anaesthesia and analgesia. This is the case, for instance, of Sweden, Switzerland, and Norway. In Germany, surgical castration without anaesthesia will become illegal in 2019. In other countries, like the Netherlands, there are private quality assurance schemes that prescribe castration with pain relief. It has to be stressed that pain relief does not sufficiently eliminate pain during castration but only reduces it. Therefore, if castration has to be performed, it should be done under effective anaesthesia and analgesia to reduce postoperative pain.

Q: How can we prevent meat with boar taint reaching consumers?

A: A **reliable method** to verify if boar meat smells deviant **is the human nose**. At the slaughterhouse, a trained operator heats a piece of neck fat from the slaughtered pig and inhales the resulting odour. Trained operators can reliably identify carcasses with boar taint. These are then separated from the rest. This human nose detection is already used in slaughterhouses in Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium. It is possible that in the future new reliable methods will also be developed.

Q: Is meat with boar taint destroyed?

A: **No. The meat can be used** to make boiled meat products or dried sausage. Consumers can only notice boar taint if they heat the meat.

Q: How can I contribute to putting an end to piglet castration and pig pain?

A: First of all, **you can sign our petition** asking your national Agricultural Minister to support a EU-ban on surgical castration by 2024. **You can also shop responsibly** and get as much information as possible about the provenance of the pork you buy. **Or you can adapt your diet** and, in so doing, reduce the demand for pig production.