

The Danish Animal Ethics Council: Statement on pig production

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Only the summary has been translated.
[The full statement is available \(in Danish\) here.](#)

Summary

Much has happened since the Danish Animal Ethics Council's statement on pig production in 1993, both in terms of research into pig welfare, ongoing discussions on animal welfare in pig production, ministerial working groups, preparation of action plans and more legislation in the area. Nevertheless, there are still major animal welfare challenges. Agreed goals in action plans have generally not, or only partially, been achieved, and knowledge about pig welfare points to continuing problems. At the same time, developments in norms for animal welfare have pushed the boundaries of what is considered acceptable to offer animals in livestock production. The Danish Animal Ethics Council therefore finds that there is a need to look at the subject again. The Council has discussed pig production from an overall ethical perspective that incorporates up-to-date knowledge about animal welfare and norms for keeping animals. The Council focuses on selected challenges in conventional production, where there are by far the largest number of pigs and, in the Council's opinion, the most significant animal welfare and animal ethics problems.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has first discussed the fundamental ethical starting points that form the basis for the Council's specific considerations and recommendations. Here, the Council has selected three focus areas: breeding, housing and surgical interventions. The Danish Animal Ethics Council questions whether breeding and keeping pigs meet the intentions of the legislation to not harm the health or welfare of animals, and to take into account the behavioral needs of the animals. Furthermore, the Council finds it unacceptable to carry out surgical interventions on the basis of inadequate housing conditions, export requirements and consumer wishes.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has then presented considerations and recommendations in four areas of action: breeding, legislation, management and control, and consumer responsibility. The Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends a more balanced breeding in terms of animal welfare, where animals are bred to be more biologically well-functioning. The Danish Animal Ethics Council further recommends that regulations for keeping pigs be reviewed with the aim of assessing whether and to what extent the behavioural needs of pigs are met, and whether they are provided with sufficient protection against pain, suffering, anxiety, permanent harm and significant disadvantage. The Council recommends that this evaluation be used as a basis for adjustments of the minimum legal requirements. At the same time, the Danish Animal Ethics Council finds the high proportion of legal offences in the industry unacceptable and makes a number of recommendations regarding control efforts and the use of sanctions. Finally, the Council believes that consumers and other purchasers of products from pig production must also take on their share of responsibility for increasing the level of welfare in pig production.

Overall, the Danish Animal Ethics Council finds that there is a need to rethink the conditions in pig production. In the Council's opinion, the minimum requirements of the law are not sufficient in a number of respects to ensure good animal welfare for pigs. At the same time, the Council finds it questionable in several cases whether the keeping of pigs and the administration of the rules in practice live up to the intentions of the legal requirements. The Council notes that the discussion about animal welfare in pig production has been going on for decades without leading to the expected improvement for the animals in this production. Against this background, the Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that requirements be made now, and with the quickest possible effect, that production must be developed in a direction where there is a better balance – from the animals' point of view – between considerations for the welfare of the animals and considerations for production conditions and economics.

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With this statement, the Danish Animal Ethics Council wishes to contribute to an evaluation and rethinking of pig production. The Council would like to highlight and focus on the fact that pig production involves individuals and sentient beings, and that pigs are not just units in food production. Through the selected examples, the Danish Animal Ethics Council shows what direction development should take and what level of animal welfare the Council believes pig production should ensure.

