



## OUR CAGE FREE CORPORATE ASK FOR SOWS

Compassion is committed to the elimination of all cages for sows and is asking for:

- ✓ **The complete phase out of sow stalls by 2027**, to be replaced by group housing of sows **throughout the dry period (i.e. inclusive of the observation period as well as pregnancy).**

Note:

- Short duration confinement may be allowed for management purposes such as feeding and conducting artificial insemination but must be restricted to 4 hours or less at a time.
- Currently EU legislation ([Council Directive 2008/120/EC](#)) allows for sows to be kept in individual sow stalls up to 4 weeks post service. We require that sows are housed in groups immediately after weaning of the piglets (ie after leaving the farrowing pens) and up to one week before the expected time of farrowing.

- ✓ **The complete phase out of farrowing crates by 2027**, to be replaced by well designed, more spacious free-farrowing pens operated under zero confinement policies.

Note:

- Temporary crating (where the sow is crated in the farrowing pen for several days around farrowing) should also be phased out.
- Short durations confinement may be allowed for management purposes but should be restricted to 2 hours or less at a time.

### 1. Recommendations on the group housing of dry sows

Dry sows should be kept in groups throughout the dry period, from weaning to one week prior to farrowing. For group housing to be successful, the following pen features and practices are needed:

- Providing sufficient space (>3m<sup>2</sup> /sow), to allow sows to move away from each other. A higher space allowance will improve welfare, reduce aggression and piglet stillbirths.
- Managing aggression through stable groups and good mixing practices (e.g. use of a specialized mixing pen with extra space and physical barriers for hiding, keeping a boar in the group, preventing competition at feeding, gradually familiarizing individuals via fence contact).
- Providing solid floors and bedding. Solid flooring with sufficient dry and clean bedding will positively impact thermal comfort, hoof condition, lameness incidence and skin lesions.
- Providing dietary fibre and manipulable materials, to satisfy hunger and fulfil foraging and exploratory needs. An appropriate diet and the provision of manipulable materials will reduce aggression and increase resting behaviour.

### EFSA recommendations on group housing of dry sows

([EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Welfare of Pigs](#), June 2022, paragraph 4.6.2)

- 1) To avoid the welfare consequences of stall housing and the possible consequences of stress during early pregnancy for reproductive performance, **sows should be grouped at the time of weaning**.
- 2) The welfare consequences associated with grouping gilts and sows should be mitigated at any stage (including for cull sows) by **good mixing practice**, including the use of mixing pens, good home pen design/layout and good feeding and general management.
- 3) **Staff should be trained** to mitigate handling stress in sows, particularly in stage 1 (preservice), and in identifying and mitigating the other welfare consequences in all stages.
- 4) The management of sows in lactation should ensure that sows are weaned (including cull sows) in **good physical condition** for grouping.

For further detailed recommendations on the effective group housing of dry sows:  
<https://www.compassioninfoodbusiness.com/media/5823244/indoor-housing-systems-for-fry-sows-practical-options.pdf>

## 2. Recommendations on the transition to free-farrowing systems for lactating sows

### 2.1. Practical alternatives to the farrowing crates

Practical alternatives to the farrowing crates are now widely available commercially and come in a range of dimensions, design, and features.



A proportion of these systems operate with systematic temporary crating (typically ranging from 3 to 10 or more days of crating), meaning that the sow is still temporarily restrained prior, during and after farrowing.



Other systems do not have the possibility to temporarily crate the sows, ensuring sow's freedom of movement at all times. Those systems, which may also be referred to as "designed pens" or "total freedom systems" (eg PigSAFE), are significantly larger, well-designed pens and have the best welfare potential for the sows and their piglets in indoor housing.



Example of a pen with temporary crating: Opti-Farrow (previously Combi-Flex), Vissing-Agro



Example of a total freedom pen (without temporary crating): PigSAFE

**We strongly encourage producers and food companies to invest in future-proofed free-farrowing systems, which do not allow for the temporary crating of sows.**

- **For existing systems that allow for temporary crating**, we recognize that some of the **early adopters** of those systems may not be able to operate successfully without temporarily crating the sows, especially those with a lower space allowance. We encourage them to reduce temporary crating to a minimum (balancing piglet mortality and sow welfare), and to plan a transition, within the life cycle of the system, towards larger, well-designed pens that can be successfully operated without routine temporary crating.
- For any **new system** (including new buildings and planned conversion from existing crates to farrowing pens), we strongly encourage producers to invest in the best available systems<sup>1</sup>. Those systems are free farrowing pens that do not allow to temporarily crate the sow, are spacious enough and well designed (see section on key design features below for further details) and can be run successfully with pre-weaning piglet mortality comparable to the farrowing crates.

<sup>1</sup> If you are already planning to invest in farrowing systems allowing for temporary crating, we strongly recommend that you follow EFSA recommendations regarding pen size and design: those systems should be well designed (see further recommendations below on pen design) and large enough (ie at least 7.8 m<sup>2</sup> with 6.6 m<sup>2</sup> for the sow) to be operated successfully under a zero confinement policy.

## 2.2. Key aspects of a successful transition to free-farrowing

A successful transition to free-farrowing is dependent on a variety of factors, including:

- Optimal pen design
- A shift in the breeding goals for sows, including reduced litter size and selecting for good maternal behaviour
- A shift in management practices and appropriate staff training.

### Free-farrowing pen design – key features<sup>2</sup>

- ✓ **Pen Size:** Minimum 7.8m<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ **Space Allowance per sow:** Minimum 6.6m<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ **Pen design:** separation of functional areas (lying/nesting, feeding and dunging areas); designed to maximise nestbuilding and maternal behaviour.
- ✓ **Well-designed nest site:** with 3 solid walls and anti-crushing features, preferably sloped walls as opposed to rails or raised bars.
- ✓ **Attractive and safe creep area:** inaccessible to the sow, heated, spacious (i.e. at least 1-1.2m<sup>2</sup> based on an average litter size of 14 piglets) with bedding.
- ✓ **Flooring:** non-slip, non-abrasive, and comfortable for the sow to rest. Includes an area of solid floor in nest area, large enough to allow nest building (~50% of total floor area for the sow), and allow for hygiene maintenance (e.g. through a slatted dunging area, sloped flooring, perforated floors). Waste management should be designed with the flooring and bedding system in mind.
- ✓ **Substrate to promote nest building behaviour:** sufficient prior to farrowing (i.e. above a depth of 5cm; or 2 kg/sow/day) and made of material with longer structure (e.g. long cut straw)
- ✓ **Bedding at all times:** Post farrowing, straw available at all times for physical and thermal comfort.
- ✓ **Design ensuring workers' safety:** e.g. easy observation and safe access to the sow and the piglets.

When breeding, management, and pen design features are all considered and optimally implemented, there can be a successful transition to free farrowing and a huge improvement in the lives of sows and their piglets.

<sup>2</sup> Recommendations largely based on [EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Welfare of Pigs](#), adopted in June 2022; Baxter, E. M., & Edwards, S. (2021). Optimising sow and piglet welfare during farrowing and lactation. In *Understanding the behaviour and improving the welfare of pigs* (pp. 121-176). Burleigh Dodds Science Publishing; Baxter E.M. et al (2011). Alternative farrowing systems: design criteria for farrowing systems based on the biological needs of sows and piglets. *Animal* 5:4 pp 580-600.

### EFSA recommendations on free farrowing pens

([EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Welfare of Pigs](#), June 2022, paragraph 5.8.2 and 5.9.6)

- 1) When converting from a system with farrowing crates to a system with farrowing pens, an adaptation period for individual sows, the herd as a whole and the stockperson will be needed before piglet survival levels will be similar or better than before the conversion.
- 2) **Temporary farrowing crate systems** can be effective in maintaining piglet survival whilst (temporarily) offering a higher degree of behavioural freedom to the sow, at space allowances below those that can be recommended for pen systems. **However, they will not allow a similar level of welfare for sow and piglets compared to a well-functioning pen system.**
- 3) **The use of a temporary farrowing crate system cannot be advised as a step in a farm's transition from using farrowing crates to farrowing pens, unless the size of the temporary farrowing crate system is the same as that of the future free farrowing pen.**
- 4) To avoid excessive competition for access to teats and significantly increased piglet mortality in large litters, **the average number of piglets born alive** in a given sow breed or line **should not exceed, and preferably be lower than, the average number of functional teats** in the population of this breed or line.
- 5) For breeding to be sustainable in terms of **sow longevity**, selection for litter size should be limited to an average number of **12–14 piglets born alive**.
- 6) **Traits relevant to piglet survival and sow longevity which could be incorporated in breeding goals** are, e.g. optimal litter size, good piglet viability, low birth weight variability, good maternal behaviour, good leg conformation and good udder quality.