



Best of **British**?

The Pig Industry Exposed



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Summary

- The British pig farming industry claims that it has some of the highest welfare standards in the world. Its promotional message – which recently featured in a number of national newspapers – bolsters this claim by showing healthy-looking pigs on thick straw or out in fields with plenty of space to roam.
- In March and April 2008 Animal Aid visited 10 English pig farms spanning five counties: Cornwall, Somerset, Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire and East Riding of Yorkshire.
- Instead of the industry-hyped rural idyll we found sows trapped in farrowing crates, bins overflowing with drugs, piles of dead animals, overcrowding, squalor, and diseased, injured and suffering animals.
- **Two of the farms we visited have board members of the British Pig Executive as their company directors. Others are owned or directed by individuals with positions of influence within the industry, by being connected to the National Pig Association, the Pig Industry Development Scheme, the European Pig Producers' Association or the National Farmers' Union. One farmer currently serves on the government's official advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC). Another is a former FAWC member.**
- While the evidence we found at farm level comprehensively disproves the claim of impressively high welfare standards, Britain also lags behind a number of other countries when it comes to welfare legislation.
- In Switzerland, for example farrowing crates were banned more than a decade ago.¹ These are contraptions that hold pregnant or newly-farrowed sows in a space so small that they cannot turn round or take a pace forward or back. In Sweden, sows may be held in a farrowing crate for a maximum of one week. In Britain, it is four weeks. There, unlike in Britain, all pigs must have access to straw or other litter material² and piglets are weaned at 5-6 weeks,³ as opposed to just 3-4 weeks in Britain.⁴
- Far from British pig farmers being in the vanguard of reform, backbench parliamentary initiatives to advance welfare have been subjected to concerted sabotage attempts by the industry. Among the consequences are that sows spent an additional three years confined in the now-outlawed dry sow stall.



- More than nine million pigs are slaughtered annually in the UK⁵
- Around 450,000 sows are currently used for breeding⁶
- Seventy per cent of British pigmeat comes from animals reared intensively, but even 'outdoor reared' and 'outdoor raised' pigs spend half or more of their lives indoors⁷
- Pigs are typically killed at around five-and-a-half months old⁸

The Industry

The pig industry is supported and championed by the National Pig Association and the British Pig Executive (BPEX) and the two organisations share a chairman.⁹

The National Pig Association works in association with the National Farmers' Union 'fighting for the growth and prosperity of the British pig industry'.¹⁰

BPEX is funded by pig farmers themselves via a levy, which currently stands at 75p per pig slaughtered,¹¹ and receives additional funding from 'other sources'.¹² It states that it is 'focused on enhancing the competitiveness, efficiency and profitability for English pig levy payers and driving demand for English pork and pig meat products'.¹³ It also offers practical advice, runs workshops and seminars and offers grants to farmers.¹⁴

BPEX has 11 directors on its board, all of whom are appointed by Defra.¹⁵ Six of them are listed as pig producers. In the course of our investigation, we visited two pig farms, which list BPEX directors as their company directors: John Rowbottom of Melrose Pigs Ltd and Meryl Ward of Ermine Farms Ltd.¹⁶



Pig Industry Claims

In September 2007, BPEX and the National Pig Association launched the Pigs Are Worth It campaign.¹⁷ A central theme – along with the feed price rises that have affected livestock farmers worldwide – is that British pig farmers allegedly have exceptionally high animal welfare standards and, as a result, have extra outlay, which does not allow them to compete fairly with pig producers in Europe. Text on the Pigs Are Worth It campaign website claims that 'breeding and raising a pig generally costs more than it does abroad, but consumers know that they are getting a top quality product from a well-cared for animal'.¹⁸

One advert placed by BPEX in the national press in September 2007 showed a healthy-looking pig in a large and clean straw-filled pen out in the sunshine. The text read 'Pig farmers in the UK already face higher costs than those in Europe, largely due to our higher standards of pig welfare'.

A second advert, which also ran nationally from January to March 2008, showed pigs living outside under a huge sky. The text read: 'The logo at the bottom of this page, the Pimeat Quality Standards Mark, is proof that farmers care about the welfare of their animals.'

In March 2008, the National Pig Association, in conjunction with BPEX, organised a rally in London.¹⁹ Once again, their media statements made reference to the high welfare standards that put British pig farmers at a disadvantage.

But the evidence we collected from ten pig farms across the country indicates that farmers – including BPEX directors – fall considerably short of the welfare standards depicted in industry-led media campaigns.

Best Standards in the World?

While the British pig industry consistently claims to have some of the best standards in the world, it fails to mention that it actually opposed legislation that has resulted in important improvements in pig welfare. When Sir Richard Body MP introduced the 1991 *Pig Husbandry Bill*, which called for a ban on tethers and stalls for sows, the South West branch of the National Farmers' Union called the Bill a 'Body Blow to Pig Farmers'.²⁰ The National Pig Breeders' Association – of which Sir Richard was a former member – also opposed it.²¹

Dry sow stalls were used to incarcerate pigs for the whole of their sixteen-and-a-half week pregnancy. They were four-sided crates, so small that the pig could not turn around. There was no bedding or materials for rooting or nesting. The tether system was similar but instead of having four sides, it had three and the sow was tethered by a short chain so that she could not move.²²

When the Bill was being debated, filibustering – time-wasting – by MPs representing pig farming constituents meant that the Bill teetered on the brink



of failure. *The Pig Husbandry Bill* passed its second reading but was later withdrawn when the government promised to bring in its own regulations. This meant, however, that the end of tethering and sow stalls in British pig farms took three years longer than if *The Pig Husbandry Bill* had been passed.²³ And had it not been for the commitment of Sir Richard Body and other MPs, pig farmers would, perhaps, still be tethering pigs and incarcerating them in sow stalls.

The routine tail docking of pigs on British farms is now banned – another example, one might think, of the strides in animal welfare that the British pig industry has made. Farmers dock tails to prevent other pigs from biting them – often the outcome when young, bored, stressed animals have nothing to stimulate their minds. It involves removing most of the tail with pliers or a hot docking iron, invariably without anaesthetic – a mutilation that is painful both at the time and sometimes for the rest of the pig's life.²⁴ But in 1997, when Chris Mullin MP introduced the *Welfare of Pigs Bill*, which would tighten up loopholes in the existing law, he was 'strongly opposed' by the National Farmers' Union.²⁵

Although routine tail docking has been prohibited in Britain since 1994 – and across the whole EU since 2003 – British farmers continue to flout this law. A 2008 report by the European Food Safety Authority found that 75-80 per cent of British pigs are still tail docked.²⁶ According to Defra's Animal Welfare Veterinary Division, this 'could be construed as a reflection of the inappropriate management systems currently in place in the pig industry'.²⁷

Weaning piglets at a very young age may be beneficial to the industry but is recognised as stressful to piglets when conducted at 3-4 weeks.²⁸ As well as attempting to crack down on tail docking, the 1997 *Welfare of Pigs Bill* also sought to stop the early weaning of piglets and suggested a minimum of 6 weeks.²⁹

The Bill was dropped due to lack of time and it took another five years before the minimum weaning time was raised from 21 days to 28 days – still two weeks short of Mullin's proposal.³⁰ And even under *The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2003*, piglets may still be weaned from 21 days if they are moved to 'specialised housing which is emptied and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before the introduction of a new group; and separate from housing where other sows are kept'.³¹

In Sweden, weaning takes place at 5-6 weeks,³² an improvement on Britain and yet still far short of the 17 weeks that pigs suckle and nurse their young in semi-natural conditions.³³

Having done all it could to oppose, subvert and ignore important moves to improve welfare standards, for the industry now to boast about these improvements is cynical and devious. Even with laws pushed through against the will of the industry, the claims that Britain has the best standards for pigs in the world is not true. Britain's modest advances in animal welfare have not been made alone, and this country is certainly not in the vanguard. Sweden, for example, banned tethering almost three decades before Britain.^{34, 35} And in 1997, Switzerland banned the use of farrowing crates altogether, making nonsense of Britain's claim that we lead the way.³⁶

The tethering of sows is now banned across the entire EU.³⁷ Sow stalls are banned in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland, as well as Britain, and in 2013 they will be illegal across the whole of the EU.³⁸

In Sweden, all pigs *must* be provided with straw or other litter material – something that British pigs are largely denied.³⁹ And pigs on Swedish farms may be held in a farrowing crate for a maximum of one week. In Britain, it is four weeks.⁴⁰



Norway will enforce a ban on the castration of piglets from 2009 – something which, although only rarely carried out in the UK, has not been outlawed here.⁴¹

And even if British pig farmers could truthfully state that they have the highest standards of animal welfare in the world, the images they present to the public are still a world away from the reality. If they are proud of their ‘high welfare’ standards, then industry figures, including BPEX’s Meryl Ward and John Rowbottom, should present images of their own farms in public campaigns, not idealised versions.

Reality

Illness, Injury and Death

At the farms we visited, injuries – such as bite marks and bloody ears – caused by the stressed and bored pigs themselves were commonplace; every farm with breeding facilities had pigs injured in this way.

We found many lame animals, including one sow with what appeared to be a broken leg that – apparently left inadequately treated – had set awkwardly, leaving her seriously incapacitated. At another farm, a piglet lay in a corner with a severely inflamed knee joint while his cage mates clambered over him. At a third farm, a sow was virtually unable to walk because of the pain caused by a hind leg.

Lameness in pigs is commonplace and may be due in large part to selective breeding. Research has found that genetically selecting pigs for lean meat has negative welfare effects, including an increased rate of leg weakness and osteochondrosis,⁴² a painful disease affecting bone growth, especially in rapidly growing animals.⁴³

We found wounds on a number of piglets and one pig had a large cyst-like swelling on her face, perhaps the result of a bite.

We found animals who were suffering from meningitis; had prolapsed; or were convulsing. At one unit – a particularly filthy farm – pigs were coughing and sneezing.

We found dead pigs at all farms with breeding facilities. At one unit, about 20 dead pigs and piglets were dumped in a heap, while, at several farms, the bodies of piglets littered the aisles of farrowing units or were dumped inside feed bags.





Overcrowded

Although the stocking density at each of these farms may fall within legal limits (it is impossible to tell from just looking), the conditions were often so crowded that we believe the public would be shocked by them.

When freed from the farrowing crates, sows who will continue to be used for breeding tend to have a little more room allotted to them than the animals fattened for slaughter. For many of these 'fattening' animals – especially those kept on slatted floors – the pens are so small that there is just enough space for the animals to all lie down.

Other set-ups provide pigs with a similarly small area to lie on but they are additionally given a separate 'dunging' area. While the total space in these units is greater than those in the slatted systems, the dry area available for the pigs to walk on is little different. And walking anywhere means negotiating the dunging area, where faecal matter rises up their legs. And when individual animals do try to stand or move away from the group, it invariably means treading on other animals. No wonder that bite marks and wounds are so common.



Pigs have a high level of curiosity and well-developed exploratory behaviour.⁴⁴ Under semi-natural conditions, they will spend 75 per cent of their active time exploring, examining, rooting and foraging.⁴⁵ In order to fulfil these natural impulses, space is essential but this – as well as any meaningful enrichment – is lacking on the farms we visited.

Lack of Enrichment

According to The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2003, 'all pigs must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of materials such as straw, hay, wood, sawdust, mushroom compost, peat or a mixture of such which does not adversely affect the health of the animals'. Pigs reared on slatted floors – a common practice at the farms we visited – are not afforded such materials as, it could be argued, they could clog up the slats and create a build up of faecal matter, thereby adversely affecting the health of the pigs. Rather than change the system, farmers simply deprive the pigs of enrichment. In so doing, they breach the spirit, if not the letter, of the law.



Instead of the required forms of enrichment, some farms provide a single metal chain or a plastic bottle on a piece of string, sometimes for a large group of animals. Such tokenistic 'enrichment' is both wholly inadequate and cynical. Defra states that these items can 'quickly lose their novelty factor. The long-term use of such items is not, therefore, recommended.'⁴⁶

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) affirms this: 'Various so-called "toys" made of plastic, rubber, chains and other non destructible materials are widely used in commercial practice. However, pigs show very limited interest in such toy like materials and they are unable to reduce the occurrence of redirected behaviour. Thus, these are example of inappropriate rooting materials.' (EFSA breeding report p. 33)⁴⁷



EFSA further states: 'Without suitable rooting and manipulation materials, pigs are likely to direct tactile behaviour towards companions using aggression.'⁴⁸

Three farms – Penare, Sandhouse and Treburgett – appeared to offer no enrichment at all.

Filth

Pigs, when given the opportunity, are known to be clean animals. Yet many were covered from head to trotter in excrement. They had no choice. At one unit, their drinking water was almost certainly contaminated with faecal matter. Slatted floors are used by several farms for the 'fattening' pigs, and are meant to allow the waste simply to fall through. Pigs in these systems tend to be cleaner but the utter barrenness of their environment is a big price to pay for cleanliness.

In 'scraped' systems – like those at Treburgett Farm – pigs are given distinct areas in which to sleep and dung. Under these systems, dung should be scraped out and disposed of frequently. At some of the farms we visited, this clearly was not the case. Pigs wishing to walk anywhere have no choice but to wade through the filth.

Pigs at Penare Farm were, perhaps, the dirtiest of all. Here, there was no distinct dunging area and, as the floor could not be seen, it's impossible to know whether it was slatted or not. No matter what this system was supposed to be, the pigs here were filthy, overcrowded and without even token enrichment.

Disease and Drugs

Given the stressful, overcrowded conditions and the inherent filth, it is little wonder that large amounts of drugs are routinely administered to pigs on intensive farms. At one farm – Lower Egford – we found dustbins overflowing with veterinary product bottles and syringes. Medications included:

M+PAC – a vaccine against *Mycoplasma hyopneumoniae* – a bacterium that causes pneumonia – which is delivered by injection into the side of the neck. Symptoms of pneumonia include respiratory distress, fever, dehydration and death.⁴⁹

CircoFLEX – an injectable vaccine against porcine circovirus, which causes postweaning



multisystemic wasting syndrome (PWMS) – a relatively new disease, first described in 1991. Symptoms include diarrhoea, respiratory distress, incoordination, enlarged lymph nodes and sudden death.⁵⁰

Enterisol Ileitis – an oral vaccine to reduce intestinal lesions associated with the bacterium *Lawsonia intracellularis*, which exists on most if not all farms. There are several conditions associated with *Lawsonia intracellularis*. Aside from intestinal lesions, inflammation and bleeding (the common name for this disease is ‘bloody gut’), external symptoms include bloody diarrhoea, gradual wasting, anaemia, weakness and sudden death.⁵¹ Makers of this vaccine boast that the drug also ‘significantly improves weight gain’⁵² – a clear selling point, given that antibiotic growth promoters were banned across the EU from January 2006.⁵³

Porcilis Ery – a vaccine injected behind the ear to control swine erysipelas, caused by the bacterium *Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae* that is found on most if not all pig farms. The disease can cause high fever, lameness, loss of appetite, congestive cardiac failure and death.⁵⁴

Porcilis PRRS – a vaccination to ward off porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome. The disease was first classified as recently as 1991. It is now pandemic. The symptoms of PRRS include respiratory distress and congestion of the extremities, characterised as ‘blue ear’.⁵⁵

Excenel – an injectable antibiotic for bacterial respiratory disease caused by *Actinobacillus (Haemophilus) pleuropneumoniae*, *Pasteurella multocida* or *Streptococcus suis* – which is also the cause of meningitis.⁵⁶ Streptococcal

meningitis is more common in piglets and weaners than in sows. Symptoms include shivering, pain, grinding teeth, movements of the eyes from side to side, fits and convulsions and death.⁵⁷

Baycox – to treat coccidiosis, a protozoic parasite (*Isospora suis*) that is commonly found on pig farms. Symptoms include diarrhoea, dehydration and wasting.⁵⁸ The manufacturers state that one of the main benefits of their drug is that it improves the animals’ growth rate.⁵⁹

These, and other veterinary drugs, were found at one farm and are used in an effort to treat or prevent many of the more common disease threats to pigs on British farms. Many of the drugs can be administered to pigs right up until slaughter, so traces may still be found in the meat consumed.

At several of the farms we visited, we found diseased pigs. At Penare Farm, there was evidence of meningitis. At Sandholme Farm, respiratory diseases were apparent with pigs coughing, sneezing and showing red-tinged eyes. Such infections are commonplace on intensive farms – far more so than on outdoor-reared pig farms, largely because of the poor air quality.⁶⁰ Ammonia, in particular, is an irritant gas, causing inflammation of the mucous membrane in the eye and respiratory tract.⁶¹

Biosecurity – or lack of it – is a contributory factor to disease outbreaks. Biosecurity measures include disinfecting boots, machinery and vehicles, cleaning equipment and isolating infected animals. While farmers tend to point the finger everywhere but at themselves when a disease outbreak occurs, a 2007 poll of 800 animal farmers found that 82 per cent admitted to inadequate or nonexistent biosecurity measures at their farms.⁶²



Death

On all farms where breeding was taking place, we found dead animals. The bodies of piglets were stuffed into bin bags; others littered the aisles of farrowing units. In some cases, piglets scampered over and investigated the bodies of their dead siblings.

Adult pigs were also found dead at a number of farms; some had been marked for culling, while others carried no such mark and died for reasons unknown to us. At Sandhouse Farm (part of the Ermine Farms group, of which BPEX director Meryl Ward is also a director and a Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) council member), a heap of around 20 dead pigs was found. Permitted methods for culling on farm include stunning followed by bleeding, stunning followed by brain pithing, and shooting with a free bullet.⁶³

Sandholme Farm may have found a cost-effective way to deal with a large number of pig deaths – the owners have set up an incinerator and now offer pet cremations to the public.



Lack of Bedding

Members of the public subjected to recent industry propaganda would be forgiven for thinking that all British pigs are given plenty of comfortable bedding to sleep on. On most farms we investigated, young piglets, sows in farrowing crates and the pigs being fattened had no bedding at all. Others were granted a tokenistic few strands.



'Metal Straitjackets'

All six of the farms that bred pigs on site used farrowing crates. These medieval-looking contraptions confine sows for about four weeks in a crate so small they can only lie down or stand up. They are unable to take a step forward or backwards, or turn around. The use of these crates is cruel and stressful, and a world away from the industry's representations of modern-day pig farms. The crates are intended to prevent sows from lying on their young and killing them – a problem exacerbated by intensive farming techniques. Modern sows have been bred to be especially large and to produce more than twice the number of young as their wild counterparts – factors which add to the likelihood of piglets being crushed.⁶⁴ In the wild, the nest would cushion and support the young, preventing much of the problem.

Alternatives to the farrowing crate already exist. The ellipsoid farrowing crate – in which the steel bars bow outwards – gives sows more freedom to move, turn around and bond with their young.⁶⁵ A Canadian study comparing the ellipsoid crate with the standard rectangular farrowing crate found that those in the ellipsoid crate produced more young and had fewer stillbirths, and that the rate of crushing was the same.⁶⁶

In another study, which compared the Werribee farrowing crate – a rectangular pen with greater floor space – with the standard version, researchers found no difference in the production and survival rates of piglets. This pen allows the sow more freedom to move and provides a protected area for the young.⁶⁷





In such outdoor herds, the softer ground, increased floor space and plenty of bedding prevent many deaths by crushing. In outdoor herds, where farrowing crates are not used, the average mortality rate of piglets (all deaths, not just those by crushing) is 9.46 per cent compared with 11.6 per cent in intensive systems where the crates are used.⁶⁸

Incarceration in farrowing crates prevents sows displaying natural behaviour at a time, perhaps, when they most need to fulfil biological and emotional impulses such as seeking privacy and nest building. A European Council directive states, 'in the week before the expected farrowing time, sows and gilts must be given suitable nesting material in sufficient quantity unless it is not technically feasible for the slurry system used in the establishment'.⁶⁹ As sows are locked into the crates during this time, and often lying on a slatted floor, nesting material is withheld.

Before farrowing, sows in the wild or in a semi-natural environment choose to walk significant distances. In the crate, inability to take even a single step inevitably causes frustration and stress.⁷⁰ Evidence of stress can be found in the higher heart rates and elevated levels of stress hormones that are found in crated sows when compared with loose-housed sows.⁷¹

The crate itself causes injuries, particularly shoulder wounds, from lying on the concrete floor. A recent *Farmers Weekly* article revealed that when the issue of sows suffering shoulder wounds was aired on Danish national television, there was a political outcry and changes were made fast to avoid the

government – which had condemned the suffering – from becoming involved.⁷² We filmed sows suffering from open wounds on their shoulders at several of the pig farms we visited.

Sows are typically kept inside farrowing crates for between four and five weeks, starting one week before giving birth until weaning. According to paperwork found at Yorkwold Pigpro, weaning takes place at 24-25 days and sows are again 'served' just 4-5 days after their litter is taken from them.

Mutilations

The Welfare of Farmed Animals Act states that tail docking – a procedure classed as a 'mutilation' and acknowledged as being painful⁷³ – 'shall not be carried out routinely' and not at all 'unless other measures to improve environmental conditions or management systems have been taken in order to prevent tail biting'.⁷⁴

The laws suggests, then, that animals in intensive conditions should not be tail docked, but should be offered a more stimulating environment instead. At two of the units we visited – Norway Farm and Yorkwold Pigpro – all piglets appeared to have undergone tail docking.

We found evidence of another form of mutilation on several of the farms we visited – 'ear notching', in which part of the pigs' ears are cut out to form a permanent identification marker. The regulations stipulate only that this procedure should be carried out by 'a trained and competent operator using properly maintained instruments', and that they should avoid the main blood vessels. It does not need to be conducted under anaesthetic.⁷⁵ Aside from the inevitable pain of cutting a piece out of the ear, the stress of the procedure can lead to higher rates of streptococcal infections.⁷⁶

The Assured British Pigs certification standard (which bears the Red Tractor logo) does not recommend ear notching but – despite its 'stringent standards' – still permits the mutilation.⁷⁷



The Ten Farms



Sandhouse Farm Ermine Farms Ltd, Appleby, Lincolnshire

The company address of Ermine Farms Ltd is registered to Grayingham Grange Farm – the farm that Meryl Ward herself manages.⁷⁸ But there are several other pig farms listed to the company,⁷⁹ including Sandhouse Farm.⁸⁰

Meryl Ward, director of Ermine Farms Ltd, is also a director of the British Pig Executive and a founder member of Agskills Ltd – a company that trains farmers to manage pig herds. Ermine Farms Ltd was among the first to be awarded a certificate of competence from Agskills.⁸¹

Given the shocking nature of this farm, it is alarming to note that Ms Ward also serves on the Farm Animal Welfare Council, the official advisory body to Defra.

At this large farm, stand a wide variety of sheds and barns. Some are divided into several separate areas and have natural light and access to the open air for the pigs. But other sheds have no natural light and appear to be purpose-built for a more intensive use.



In the farrowing units, we found rows of mothers, incarcerated within metal bars. When lying down, there was barely an inch of space spare. In some crates, the floor was slatted, and marked the mothers' skin. There was no bedding or comfort available. A solid floor panel outside the crate allowed the piglets some relief from the plastic slats.

Other farrowing pens had solid concrete floors. A few strands of straw had drifted over from where the young lay under lamps. They, too, were afforded just a few strands. In these concrete pens, a metal grate below the sow allowed urine and faeces to drain away. A radio was on in this farrowing unit but not in the previous one.



When not incarcerated in the farrowing crates, sows used for breeding were kept in groups and lived on straw. Either the straw or the music blasting from a radio seemed to calm these pigs, and they slept soundly, their snouts buried in the straw. A large red cross painted on her back said that one sow would soon be culled – perhaps for not producing enough piglets.

A number of different buildings housed 'fattening' pigs. Some lived in barren concrete pens on slatted floors. These pigs had no bedding and, despite it being a legal requirement within the EU,⁸² there was no sign of any enrichment at all in these pens.





Other sheds housed large numbers of young pigs. In these, the floor was covered by a thick layer of faeces and the pigs were filthy from head to trotter. They waded towards us through the slippery mess. A sleeping area towards the rear of the shed we visited appeared dry. In the background, coughing could be heard.

A third type of shed looked to be the most makeshift of all. An old-fashioned sty made from an arc of corrugated iron kept young gilts in extremely crowded conditions. Dirt hung down from the ceiling. These young females were afforded straw.

Outside, dumped on the grass, lay the body of a young pig. His small frame was covered with

scratches and bites. He was, perhaps, the victim of bullying by stressed and bored siblings.

A large number of dead pigs – perhaps 20 in all – were also found dumped in a heap. Some looked to be days old; others were full-grown. One had a bloody snout. Some bodies bore a large red cross on their backs – a sign that they were culled either because of sickness or infertility or simply because they were too small to be profitable. As the bodies did not appear to have decomposed, these deaths could all have occurred in the very recent past.

Outside the sheds stood bin bags, full of dead piglets.





Norway Farm

Melrose Pigs Ltd, Bridlington, East Riding of Yorkshire

The company, Melrose Pigs Ltd, is registered to Melrose Farm in Melbourne, Yorkshire⁸³ but other farms, including Norway Farm, near Bridlington, are listed to the company as well.⁸⁴

This business, which breeds from 750 sows, belongs to John Rowbottom and his family. Rowbottom is a Melrose Pigs Ltd company director, as well as a British Pig Executive director and a member of the National Pig Association Producer Group.⁸⁵

The farm we visited consists of one massive shed, divided into pens covering all stages of pig production.

Rows of barren farrowing crates held mothers in place. The slatted floors keep the area clean but are clearly uncomfortable for mothers and young. The piglets were given a flat board, which – although slippery to walk on – offered them an alternative to the slats on which to sleep. But for the mothers there was no respite – and some had suffered bloody pressure sores on their shoulders as a result. One sow had a bloody ear, another was bleeding from her rear. One piglet lay dying next to his mother but she was unable to turn around to nuzzle or comfort him. Other piglets – all of whom appeared to have been tail docked – scampered over the top of him. Another in the same litter lay on the slats, his knee joint painfully inflamed.



Looking down the row of imprisoned mothers, it was clear that the misery for two would soon end – red crosses were sprayed on their backs, denoting that they were soon to be culled. Outside in the dirt lay the body of another sow bearing this same mark. And close by stood a metal bin, half full of dead piglets.



In a separate unit, pigs – probably breeding sows not ready for farrowing – were kept in a group. Here they were given straw to lie on and they used a separate area for dunging. In this environment, the pigs appeared more relaxed.

In another section of the barn, more than 100 pigs were kept together, and there was little room for the animals to move. Their ears had been notched and some tails were docked. Inquisitive pigs picked their way through the thick layer of slippery filth on the floor to visit our investigator. In this group, almost all who approached the camera bore the marks of bullying – bloody ears, and bite marks across their faces, necks, ears and shoulders.

One had clearly had part of her ear bitten off, and the wound continued to bleed.





Kilham Road Unit & Slatherdale Unit

Yorkwold Pigpro Ltd, Driffield, East Riding of Yorkshire

Kilham Road Unit & Slatherdale Unit

This large-scale business spans a number of farms across East Riding of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire⁸⁶ and includes these combined units in Kilham Road.⁸⁷

The joint managing director of Yorkwold Pigpro Ltd, Jim Dewhirst, has been an active member of the National Pig Association and, along with BPEX directors John Godfrey and Richard Longthorpe, was a board member of the Pig Industry Development Scheme.⁸⁸ He was also vice-chairman of the British Pig Association, the UK chairman of the European Pig Producers' Association and a member of the government's advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council.⁸⁹

His son, Joe Dewhirst, now runs the business and attended the Pigs Are Worth It rally in London in March 2008,⁹⁰ organised by the National Pig Association and supported by BPEX.⁹¹

The farrowing units incarcerated mothers in metal bars on a slatted floor. A board below their top half allowed them meagre comfort. The young piglets climbed on top of a piece of white board for relief but there was no bedding. On top of one such board, a piglet lay dead. Another had a bloody snout.

Paperwork pinned to the walls gave information about each sow – the price paid for her, her age, how many litters she had borne, how many of her piglets had died and how, the dates she was 'served' and farrowed, and the dates her piglets were weaned.



The piglets' progress was similarly monitored. A graph plotted their feed allowance. This paperwork showed that the sows are made pregnant again just 4-5 days after their young are taken from them.

Several dozen pigs were fattened together in barren pens with a slatted concrete floor. When lying down, there appeared to be little or no space for movement within the pen.

There were several bloody ears, and one pig had a bloody wound on her hip. Many were covered in bite marks on their bellies and flanks.

A metal chain or a bottle on a string provided their only 'enrichment'.

Outside, the bodies of dead piglets lay dumped in the yard.





Edneys Farm Rainbow Pigs Company Ltd, Mells, Somerset



John Candy, director of Rainbow Pigs Company Ltd, was Chairman of the South West National Pig Association when the 2001 Foot & Mouth outbreak erupted. A newspaper article from that time confirmed that Candy had 4000 pigs at his farm but our investigations reveal that this number has dropped significantly since then. The farm continues, however, to breed, farrow and fatten pigs.⁹²

In the farrowing crates, sows were trapped by metal bars on a concrete floor. A metal grille allowed faeces and urine to fall away. Sows in the crates had no bedding at all, and were unable to step forward or backwards, or turn around.

Their piglets were provided with a creep box and a heat lamp. In some of the boxes, a smattering of straw could be seen. In others, there was not a

single strand. Most litters were kept separate from one another but in at least one area, the barrier was down and two litters could mix together.

In 2001, as foot and mouth spread from a pig farm, John Candy, who was then the Chairman of the South West National Pig Association, appeared on television to defend the pig industry. In the interview, he said he was proud of the good hygiene on pig farms. During our visit, we filmed a stillborn piglet lying beside a bloody placenta amongst live electrical wires, right next to a crate holding a mother and her live piglets.

Weaners – very young pigs taken from their mothers – were housed here in large numbers in a barren, slatted-floor unit. There was no bedding and their only 'enrichment' consisted of a chain hanging from the roof. These young animals were in constant movement, possibly to investigate their new surroundings, or looking for a way back to their mothers.

Through a door marked 'Gilts' – typically denoting young females who have not yet been bred from – we found smaller groups on slatted floors in barren pens. Once again, the only 'enrichment' was a chain; there was no bedding, little room to move and, apparently, nowhere to go. In these pens, signs of aggression could be seen in the sore and ripped ears. One pig had a large lump on her face, which resembled an abscess – possibly the result of a bite.

The ammonia levels in the gilt house were so high that our investigator felt giddy.



Lower Egford Farm Egford Bacon Ltd, Frome, Somerset



At this large intensive farm, pigs are bred, born, weaned and fattened. New mothers were incarcerated in ramshackle farrowing crates. They had no bedding but stood and laid on concrete floors with a grate towards the back of the crate for their urine and faeces to drain through. Metal bars held them in place; their only option was to stand up or lie down. When they lay down, there was barely an inch of space spare. When standing, they could not take a step forward or backwards, nor could they turn round. One

mother had a bloody wound on her tail and at least two others had pressure sores on their shoulders.

Piglets had access to their mother within her barren crate and also to a creep box, where they could be kept warm beneath a heat lamp. Paperwork found in the farrowing unit detailed the number of dead.

Once weaned, the pigs are moved to group housing to be fattened. Here, they are kept in concrete pens on slatted floors. There was no bedding and no comfort. The slats are intended to drain away all the waste that the pigs produce but the animals were still covered in dirt. Some pigs bore the marks of the stress they endure – they were covered in scratches and bites. There was evidence of lameness, and one animal struggled to place any weight on a painful rear limb.

‘Enrichment’ for these pigs was a single metal chain hanging from the ceiling.

Outside in the yard lay a dead pig. Bin bags were stuffed with dead piglets and what appeared to be either newborns or stillborns had been swept up with the trash.

Large dustbins overflowed with used veterinary product bottles and syringes.

This 500-sow farm is owned by Norman White who has been at Lower Egford Farm since 1976. In 2003, the British Pig Executive issued a press release, which confirmed that Mr White had helped with a cookery demonstration at their third Pig to Plate seminar.⁹³





Penare Farm St Columb, Cornwall



This farm consists of a large collection of buildings, old and new. Farrowing crates are housed in various buildings, including Portakabins, where filthy metal bars held mothers inside cobbled-together crates. One pen was broken, allowing the piglets out into the rest of the building. There was evidence that sows were suffering the physical effects of their incarceration in these crates – wounds could clearly be seen on some of their shoulders.



In a second, purpose-built farrowing unit, dead piglets littered the aisles. One had a bloody and swollen mouth. Another lay next to a tray full of veterinary products. Here, mothers lived on plastic slats, while their very young piglets found the one flat area to sleep on. At least two piglets had large open wounds on their legs. In one pen, a dying piglet lay next to the living.

Still more sows are housed in individual pens. Some laid on straw, with metal farrowing bars





once again keeping them in one place. Others were on paper. All were trapped within farrowing bars. One mother lay close to her litter but was unable to reach one young piglet who convulsed and gasped.

The 'fattening' pens were filthy. The floor either had no slats or the slats were entirely blocked with faeces and – like the pigs who were kept there – were covered in filth. There was no straw and no other kind of enrichment visible, despite there being a legal requirement to provide it. The pigs' water was very close to the floor and was also filthy. It was undoubtedly contaminated with faecal matter.

Another unit held more fattening pigs, this time on a slatted floor, which allowed the waste to drain away. One pig had what appeared to be a prolapse, so large that it reached the floor. Defra's *Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Pigs* states: 'If an unfit animal does not respond to treatment, it should be humanely killed on-farm (culled). You should cull any animals suffering from painful and incurable conditions immediately.' But, despite a red cross being sprayed on her back – a sign that she was due to be killed – she was still alive two days after our visit when – at our prompting – the RSPCA inspected the farm.

A segregation unit had been set up for the many sick and injured pigs on this farm. In one concrete box lay three piglets. One was convulsing. Their water trough was dirty and empty. In another pen lay three older pigs, their ears and snouts ripped, scratched and bleeding. In a third pen lay another young pig, wide-eyed and shaking uncontrollably. He was likely to be suffering from meningitis. In the same pen, a young pig had swollen and red eyes, and froth was coming from her mouth.

A pig with her rib cage visible was in a pen adjacent to a large pig with a badly broken leg. It appeared to be an old break and – left inadequately treated – it had set backwards from the shoulder girdle. As this pig struggled to stand, it is clear that she could bear no weight on that limb. Again, the law states that she should have been culled rather than left in that painful condition but she bore no mark to suggest her misery would soon be over.

Other pigs lay listless and unresponsive to their pen-mates chewing at their ears or cheeks.

Outside and near to an incinerator, we found many plastic feed bags full of dead piglets. Ironically, the brand name on the bags was 'Piglet's Choice'.

Conditions at this farm were so dreadful that we reported it to the RSPCA. Sadly, they declined to take action, citing it as normal for pig farms.



Crossbones Farm Rhal Farms Ltd, Thirsk, North Yorkshire

Rhal Farms Ltd is another family company with several pig farms.⁹⁴ Doreen and Robinson Bosomworth and their son, Trevor, are all directors. Trevor represented the National Farmers' Union at a 2002 meeting about Foot & Mouth.⁹⁵ During the 2001 outbreak, 9,000 pigs were slaughtered at their farms.⁹⁶

There appeared to be no breeding or farrowing facilities at Crossbones Farm. Instead, pigs are simply fattened for slaughter. Here, pigs lay in large groups, with a smattering of hay on the ground. In other areas, the hay was deeper and provided interest for the young animals.

In one unit, almost every pig bore multiple wounds from fighting – a sign that the needs of the pigs were not being met.⁹⁷ At farms like this one, where pigs are fattened, rather than bred and reared, it is common to mix groups of pigs from different sources. But this practice can lead to serious welfare problems and might explain the large number of injuries. A 2007 report into the welfare of fattening pigs by the European Food Safety Authority states: 'Mixing unacquainted pigs leads to a substantial risk of fighting, injury and production loss.'





Sandholme Farm Thirsk, North Yorkshire



At this ramshackle collection of buildings live around 400 pigs in groups of 40-50. Below their feet lay the filth of many generations of pigs, which had now raised the floor by between one and two feet. Possibly as a consequence of this build-up of faecal matter and urine, several animals emitted a rasping cough; others sneezed. Some had red-tinged eyes and one had mucus dripping from her snout.

The animals had a dry area just large enough to sleep on but there was no dry space available to

walk on. Many of the pigs were covered in faeces. Because so many animals were kept together with such a small dry area, pigs had no choice but to tread on one another in order to reach the dunging area. As they moved around the pen, their feet sunk into the dirt. At least one showed signs of diarrhoea. The pigs here were young and, still inquisitive, attempted to forage in the dirt.

There were no breeding or farrowing facilities evident; pigs were simply fattened for slaughter. Some of the pigs had multiple bite marks on their bodies, which might be explained by the mixture of breeds found. The mixing of unacquainted pigs has adverse effects on welfare, including aggressive interactions between pigs.⁹⁸

Given the filth and respiratory illness at this farm, deaths are likely to occur. It is apt, then, that the owners – the Sanderson family – have an incinerator on site and offer pet cremations.

Their pig farming enterprise has been awarded certification through a CMi assurance scheme.⁹⁹ According to the CMi website, 'Companies who achieve CMi certification are recognised as attaining standards well above the minimum requirements'.¹⁰⁰





Trewethen Pig Farm St Teath, Cornwall



Pigs are fattened at this farm but we found no farrowing stalls or breeding facilities. Here, pigs live on barren floors in small pens with around 14 others.

The floors were solid concrete with a thin veneer of sand. There was no bedding and the only enrichment was a plastic milk bottle suspended on a piece of string. The pens were cramped

and some animals were filthy. One pig limped towards our camera. In the background a pig was coughing.

There appeared to be a number of different breeds mixed together. Mixing pigs can lead to serious welfare problems – not least from injuries inflicted by the pigs on one another. And mixing herds also raises the risk of disease spread.¹⁰¹





Treburgett Piggery St Teath, Cornwall

We found no sign of breeding facilities or farrowing units here. The 'fattening' pigs were housed in a variety of sheds and Portakabins divided into different size pens.

Younger pigs lived on wire mesh floors in a shockingly cramped, utterly barren environment. The walls were concrete, and metal bars divided the pens. Despite there being a legal requirement, there was no enrichment for them at all. In contrast to the other farms, the pigs here were extremely nervous of humans – a response which, according to the European Food Safety Authority, is related to poor stockmanship and results in poor welfare.¹⁰²

These young pigs remained inquisitive and were constantly on the move. To lie down in such overcrowded conditions could lead to being trampled upon. There appeared to be a mixture of breeds housed together – which is known to increase the incidence of fighting and injuries.

As they grow, they are moved to larger pens with solid floors. Around 14 pigs shared a unit. Muck covered the walls and the floor was barren. Their dry sleeping area was raised just a few inches above the thick filth of the dunging area. The dry



area available for them to stand or sleep in was very small and walking anywhere, other than in the quagmire of faeces and urine, was impossible. There appeared to be no enrichment at all – not even a token effort of a hanging chain – which contravenes European law. By the time they are moved to these larger pens, the pigs' ears are 'notched' – a painful mutilation.¹⁰³



Legal Protection for Pigs

Pigs are protected by the **Animal Welfare Act 2006 (AWA)**, under which it is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. The Act also contains a Duty of Care, so that anyone responsible for an animal must take reasonable steps to make sure the animal's needs are met. This includes pig farmers.

These general requirements are supplemented by detailed requirements set out in the **Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007**, which are made under the AWA.

Regulation 4(2)(d) requires that a person responsible for a farmed animal 'must have regard to its physiological and ethological needs in accordance with good practice and scientific knowledge'.

The key provisions of the Regulations on pig welfare are:

- That all pigs must have permanent access to manipulable materials
- Minimum space allowances for sows and gilts;
- An increase in the minimum weaning age from 21 to 28 days, although piglets may still be weaned at 21 days if they are taken to a specialised, disinfected unit.¹⁰⁴

Enforcement

If the strict letter of the law were to be followed, most intensive farmers would be prosecuted under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. But this law, heralded as a major breakthrough in animal protection, is worth nothing unless it is enforced.



Animal Health (formerly the State Veterinary Service) carries out welfare inspections on farms to check that the legislation and the welfare codes are being followed. Where welfare problems are found, it usually gives advice or warnings to farmers. Prosecutions are extremely rare.

The RSPCA responds to complaints about farms but, again, prosecutes very few. Intensive farms, by their nature, are rife with health and welfare problems. If dogs, for example, were kept in those same conditions, prosecutions would be more likely. But, with animals destined for slaughter, there is a *laissez-faire* attitude, as though their lives and welfare are somehow less important than other animals.

It is clear that there is no meaningful enforcement of laws intended to protect farmed animals.





Conclusion

According to recent industry hype, the British pig farmer is an endangered species. Glossy adverts from the British Pig Executive (BPEX)¹⁰⁵ blame high grain prices for causing their financial hardships and claim that maintaining 'high welfare standards' further increases financial outlay. Unless consumers choose British pigmeat and are willing to pay more for it, it is claimed, the industry will collapse altogether.

Rising grain costs affect everyone, not just British pig farmers. To distinguish themselves from foreign pig farmers, the industry has therefore attempted to focus consumers' attention on the supposed high welfare standards that make their product more desirable and worthy of support. And like many businesses with a product to promote, the images presented in their advertising campaigns bear little resemblance to reality.

Instead of idyllic images of straw-filled pens amidst leafy trees and bathed in sunlight, we found squalor, filth, death and disease. Where the industry portrays pigs growing up outside with acres of space to roam, we found dead and dying piglets living in utterly barren, overcrowded pens. In the promotional images, pigs can root around in the earth. In reality, these inquisitive, lively and intelligent animals often had nothing but a metal chain – and sometimes nothing at all – to stimulate them and help fulfil their basic desires.

The Quality Pork Standard mark, one advert states, 'is proof that farmers care about the welfare of their animals'.¹⁰⁶ But the proof of how welfare-friendly British farms are, lies not with industry propaganda but with photos and film taken on unannounced visits to real farms.

Further proof of the low regard that farmers have for the welfare of pigs can be found in their tradition of opposing legislative moves that would raise welfare standards. Dry sow stalls and tethering continued to be used for an additional three years when the Pig Husbandry Bill was sabotaged. And even when welfare laws are passed – such as the ban on routine tail docking – they continue to be flouted.

The farms Animal Aid reports on in this dossier – some of which were linked closely to leading pig industry figures – were not 'cherry picked' from a

larger number visited. We visited ten farms and all are represented. Nothing we saw at any of these farms in any way resembles the promotional images used.

As for the claims that Britain has the best welfare standards in the world, we need only look to other European countries including Sweden (which banned tethering three decades before Britain) and Switzerland (which has banned the use of farrowing crates altogether) to see that Britain is not leading the way.

Rather than concentrating its attentions on improving welfare standards in the UK, the industry focuses on selling an idealised vision to an increasingly welfare-conscious public.

If leading industry figures sincerely believe that welfare standards on typical British pig farms are so high, why do they not use images from their own farms in advertising campaigns?

The answer surely lies in the obvious: that if dead, dying, sick and injured pigs, existing in filthy, cramped conditions with nothing but a chain – and in some cases, nothing at all – to stimulate their inquisitive minds were shown, consumers would be appalled. But while the idealised vision is perpetuated through expensive PR offensives, and while 'celebrity' farmers plead for the future of 'high welfare' pig farms, the wretched truth is pushed aside: that welfare standards on typical British pig farms are abysmally poor.

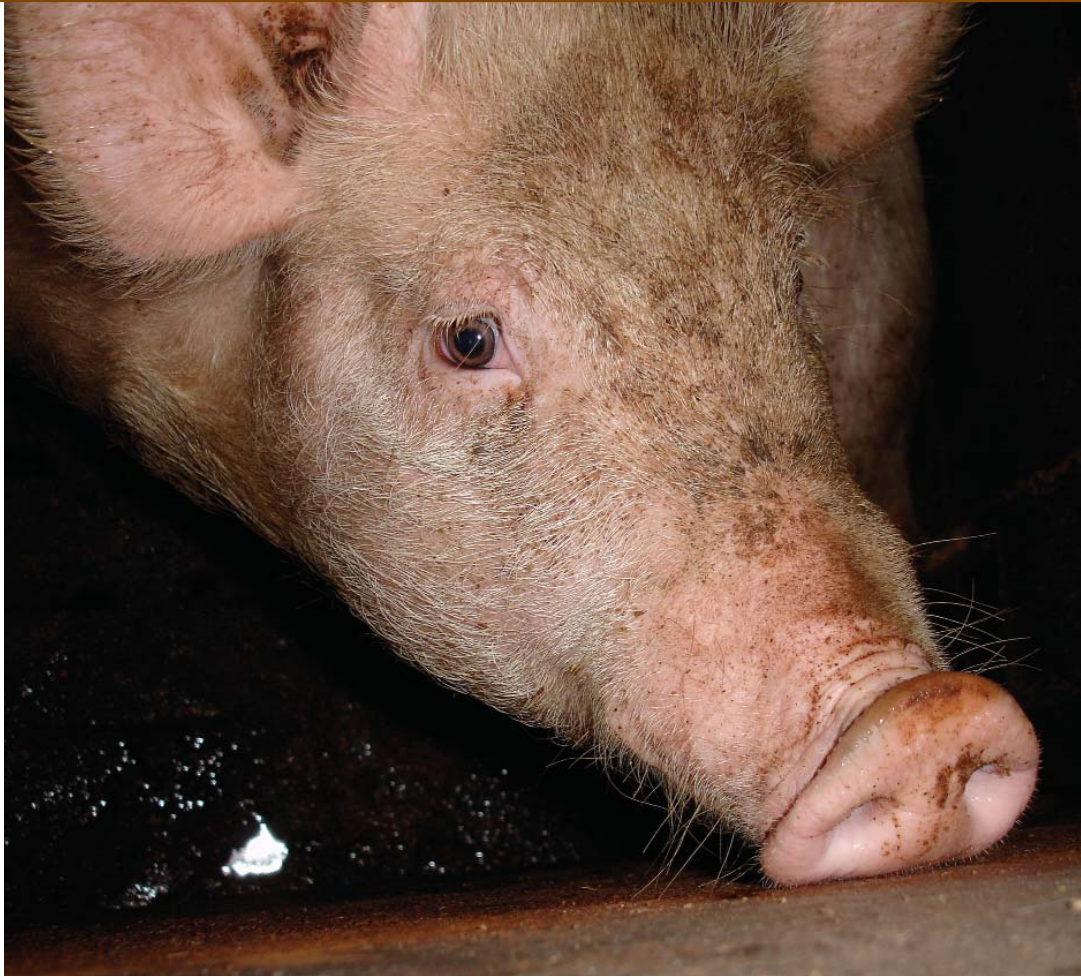
Rarely has there been such a huge disparity between marketing hype and truth as has been evinced in the recent industry promotion of British pig production.



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Animal Aid exposes and campaigns peacefully against all animal abuse, and promotes a cruelty-free lifestyle

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