RESOLUTION #—2014
Select Regular Annual Session

Submitted by Petition by AVMA Members
(Petition submitted by the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association on behalf of more than 1,000 veterinarians, including 925 AVMA Members, from all 50 states)

TITLE

RESOLVED, that the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) supports housing breeding sows in a manner that allows them enough room to stand up, fully turn around and stretch their limbs during their gestation period. To assure this, the sentence in the current AVMA policy statement on pregnant sow housing, “Allow sows to express normal patterns of behavior,” should be changed to “Allow sows to express normal patterns of behavior, including being able to stand up, fully turn around and stretch their limbs.”

This proposed change is highlighted below in bold in the current AVMA policy statement:

Current AVMA Policy Statement on Pregnant Sow Housing With Proposed Resolution Change in Bold:

Pregnant sows are kept in a variety of housing systems. Sow housing and management systems should:
- Provide every animal access to appropriate food and water;
- Promote good air quality and allow proper sanitation;
- Protect sows from environmental extremes;
- Reduce exposure to hazards that result in injuries, pain, or disease;
- Facilitate the observation of individual sows to assess their welfare;
- Allow sows to express normal patterns of behavior, including being able to stand up, fully turn around and stretch their limbs.

There are advantages and disadvantages to any sow housing system. Appropriate training is required for any management system to accommodate the welfare of the sow. Gestation stall systems may minimize aggression and injury, reduce competition, and allow individual feeding and nutritional management, assisting in control of body condition. Stall systems restrict normal behavioral expression. Group housing systems are less restrictive but allow aggressive and competitive behaviors that could be detrimental to individual sows. Genetics and breed selection could promote good sow welfare by matching animals to the appropriate housing system. To address animal welfare in the long term, advantages of current housing systems should be retained while making improvements in design to overcome problems identified.

The AVMA encourages research into housing systems for pregnant sows that improve their welfare.

Statement about the Resolution

The focus of this petition is to change the AVMA’s policy statement on pregnant sow housing in a way that will acknowledge and potentially lead to a correction of a significant welfare issue.

- The intensive confinement of pregnant sows in gestation crates for a prolonged period of time creates serious physical and psychological consequences. Given the viable alternatives to gestation crates, namely a variety of group housing options, there is a global trend toward phasing out gestation crate use where growing social concern and acknowledgement of the ethical issues inherent in gestation crates is being recognized.
• Gestation crates are stalls with metal bars and concrete floors used by commercial pork producers to individually confine pregnant sows. They are typically only 2.5 feet wide x 7 feet long in size, restricting movement so severely that the sows are unable to turn around.

• Welfare concerns associated with gestation crate housing include:
  1. Inability to express natural behaviors such as foraging, grazing and socialization with others, as well as simply just being able to turn around.
  2. Abnormal stereotypical behaviors such as bar biting are common, presumably due to boredom and frustration.
  3. Frequent development of disuse osteoporosis and lameness, urinary tract infections and obesity.

• Pregnant sows spend approximately 65% of their life span confined in gestation crates.
  1. When gestation crates are combined with the use of farrowing crates (which is typical), breeding sows spend approximately 80% of their life spans in extreme confinement.

• There is a global trend toward the elimination of gestation crates.
  1. In the past decade, nine states in the United States have voted to phase out the use of gestation crates.
  2. They are being phased out in the European Union, Canada, India, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

• Industry shifts within North America also indicate a pronounced movement away from the use of gestation crates.
  1. Major North American pork producers are shifting away from gestation crates to group sow housing during gestation.

    ➢ In 2007, Smithfield Foods, the world’s largest pig producer, and Maple Leaf, Canada’s largest pig producer, made corporate commitments to phase-out their use of gestation crates. In January 2014, Smithfield Foods extended its group sow housing commitment from its company-owned operations to its contractors, as well.

    ➢ Other major North American pork producers such as Tyson, Hormel, Olymel, and Hatfield have made similar commitments to phase out gestation crate use.

  2. More than 60 of the world’s leading food companies have mandated the phase out of gestation crates for pigs in their pork supply chains. Those include McDonald’s, Burger King, Wendy’s, SUBWAY, Oscar Mayer, Kroger, Safeway, Costco, Denny’s, Jack in the Box, Carl’s Jr., Hardee’s, Sodexo, Sysco, ARAMARK, Compass Group, Heinz, Campbell Soup, Baja Fresh, Wienerschnitzel, and Harris Teeter.

The recently released AVMA backgrounder on gestation sow housing acknowledges the welfare disadvantages associated with gestation stalls, with this housing method receiving a “poor” ranking for sow mobility, behavioral diversity, and foraging opportunities. The backgrounder concludes with a recommendation that refinements include providing sows the ability to move. “There is an ongoing need to develop an array of housing systems that suit local conditions, effectively provide enhanced opportunities for the sows to move and interact socially, and avoid an unacceptable increase in negative outcomes such as injury associated with aggression or exposure to environmental hazards.”
Financial Impact:

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