

# **An Evaluation of the Manitoba Hog Industry**

**Report prepared by: Brittany Semeniuk, Animal Welfare Consultant,  
Winnipeg Humane Society**

*August, 2020*

## **Definitions**

**Humane:** Having or showing compassion or benevolence.

(eg: The Winnipeg *Humane* Society's mandate is to protect and improve the welfare of all animals)

**Welfare:** An individual's physical and psychological state of well-being, health and happiness.

(eg: The Winnipeg Humane Society's mandate is to protect and improve the *welfare* of all animals)

## **Manitoba's Hog Industry At A Glance**

Manitoba is the largest pork producing province in Canada, with roughly 7,700,000 pigs raised in 2019, and approximately 3,400,000 pigs housed at any given time within Manitoba. This accounts for roughly 28% of Canada's 26,954,900 pigs raised in 2019. Though our province employs roughly 16,000 people in the pork industry, there are countless other agricultural sectors that offer job opportunities to many workers as the sectors continue to grow. This includes staple crops like canola, hemp, and potatoes, as well as the upcoming and booming pea protein industry. With Manitoba recently granted \$100 million dollars to expand the industry, this is sure to become a growing sector full of countless job opportunities. Furthermore, the majority of jobs within Manitoba's hog industry are relatively low-paid, difficult and dangerous roles given to vulnerable immigrants, and not community stakeholders. Such positions also lead to economically inefficient high turnover rates as well.

Of the roughly 595 hog barns located within Manitoba, only 33% are traditional farrow to finish facilities. Despite this, these barns house more than 50% of our province's pigs. In 2015, there were 80 hog barns within Manitoba equipped to hold more than 1,000 sows. These units averaged roughly 3,066 sows per barn, and comprised of 79.1% of all sows within the province. Manitoba slaughterhouse facilities slaughter roughly 6,900,000 hogs in total every year. This equates to almost 19,000 pigs slaughtered every single day, or 13 pigs slaughtered every single minute within our province. Community feedback from leading international animal advocacy groups has shown that the general public is increasingly expecting a high level of animal care that is more individualized. When examining industry statistics like those mentioned above, it is undeniably evident that within Manitoba's hog industry, the animals are still viewed as units of production, and that individual care is simply not possible. Fundamentally, industrialized hog production in Manitoba follows a herd health philosophy, where herd health by definition, denies a high level of care for any particular individual animal.

Canada exported 5,057,143 million live pigs in 2019, with Manitoba being the largest hog exporting province. Countries that Canada exports live pigs to include, but are not limited to: the United States, South Korea, Russia and China. Whether exporting live horses, pigs, or chickens for slaughter, it is impossible to humanely load, transport, and export mass quantities overseas, to then walk away of any responsibility towards their care and slaughter. Canadians were recently outraged over the recent tragedy on Ukrainian International Airlines, involving over 500 French bulldog puppies, of which 38 perished during transport. As pigs are superior in intelligence to any domestic dog breed, why is it that mass exportation across the world is still considered an acceptable and humane industry practice?

## **Raising Pigs in Manitoba**

Pigs can naturally live 15-20 years when given the opportunity. Gilts sexually mature at 5-6 months of age, at which point they are artificially inseminated. Gilts and sows are then traditionally moved into gestation crates, which prohibit their ability to walk or turn around. Research has shown that prolonged intensive confinement causes measurable psychological distress, alongside physical abnormalities, including muscle atrophy, decubital ulcers, swollen joints, broken teeth, and more.

When gilts and sows are near the end of their 114 day gestation, they are moved to a farrowing crate to prepare for parturition. Similar to gestation crates, farrowing crates prevent the sow from having the ability to turn around, walk, or have any space away from their piglets. Sows birth an average of 10-12 piglets per litter, who are provided with a small 'creep' area intended to protect them from the sow.

When piglets are 10-14 days old they are 'processed' by non-veterinary personnel. Their needle teeth are clipped without anesthetic. Their ears are tattooed with traditional clamp tattoos without anesthetic. Their tails are docked without anesthetic. Despite being 7-10 pounds in weight, the piglets are castrated with a scalpel blade by non-veterinary personnel, without any general or local anesthesia provided. Administration of a single analgesic agent dose is listed as required as per NFACC's amendments to the *Codes of Practice For Pigs* in 2016. However, no specific analgesic is listed or recommended, and no time frame is specified for how long the analgesic effect must last. In comparison, a 7-10 pound neutered dog or cat will typically be supplemented with analgesic drugs for 3 days post castration.

After 21 days of the sow confined to the farrowing crate, piglets are then weaned and moved to form large groups in grower/finishing barns until they reach slaughter weight at 5 months of age. Sows are removed from the farrowing crate and artificially inseminated again, to produce an average of 2.3 litters annually. This equates to a sow being pregnant (historically in a gestation crate) for 263 days of the year, and lactating in a farrowing crate for roughly 49 days of the remaining 102 days of the year. Simply put, sows in industrial livestock operations historically spend 312 out of 365 days intensively confined every single year until they are culled.

Sows restricted in farrowing crates have no opportunity to have space and time away from their piglets, despite research showing that *"Piglets reared in an enriched group farrowing system (straw-bedded farrowing boxes and a communal area) were better adapted to social and non-social challenges at weaning compared to piglets from an individual farrowing system (Hillmann et al. 2003)"*.

Sows are then culled after producing 3-6 litters on average, so as to not risk declining litter sizes, therefor keeping productivity at a maximum. It is evidently clear that the sole purpose of a sow is to birth a 'product' as efficiently as possible. When productivity even remotely begins to decline, they are killed. Research papers addressing sow productivity go on to state that *'..a sow not gestating or lactating, is not producing pigs which are the saleable*

*products that generate income for commercial pork operations. Every non-productive day incurred for a sow costs the producer anywhere from \$1.60 to \$2.60 (Rix and Ketchem, 2009)*

Despite the statistics, reports and evidence widely available, Canada's hog industry continues to attempt to convince the general public that the welfare of their sows trumps both productivity and profitability.

## **Transportation**

Sows scheduled to be culled are transported to one of three provincial assembly yards where they are held for a number of days with hogs from other barns, until they are again loaded and transported to a slaughter facility in the United States. Industry reports have stated that the transportation of culled hogs to the United States can last "*in excess of a day and in some cases maybe a couple of days.*" According to the federal *Health of Animals Regulations*, swine are not to exceed transportation times of 28 hours without food, water or rest.

Additionally, despite amendments in 2019, the *Health of Animals Regulations* has no does not prohibit the transportation of hogs in extreme heat and extreme cold. The *NFACC's Codes of Practice of Pigs* lists temperatures exceeding 37.8 degrees Celsius as "dangerous," yet still does not prohibit transportation of pigs at this temperature. Reports from animal advocacy watchdog groups have shown internal transport truck temperatures registering at >45 degrees Celsius when external temperatures were registering as 30 degrees Celsius.

## **Phasing Out Gestation Stalls in Manitoba**

Standard industry husbandry practices are derived from the National Farm Animal Care Council's non-legally binding *Code of Practice for Pigs*, with amendments implemented in 2016. Included in the amendments was the requirement to phase out gestation crates and provide all sows with alternative housing (ie: group housing) by 2024. According to the Codes, any newly constructed barns built after 2014 must house sows in groups, while still permitting sows to be confined in gestation crates for 28 days of their 114 day gestation. Newly built gestation crates are required to be slightly larger than previous models, but still do not have to be large enough to permit the sow to turn around or walk. All hog producers

with existing operations have until 2024 to transition to larger gestation crates and/or group housing systems.

With transparency and public trust being two issues currently on the agendas of many livestock producers, Manitoba's hog industry has failed to provide clarity on how many Manitoban producers have already transitioned to group housing, and how many producers are still utilizing gestation crates (and for what duration of gestation).

Manitoba Pork has since released a booklet entitled '*Options for Successful Group Housing of Sows*' as a guide to assist producers with the transition, as there are various methods listed to successfully convert a barn to group housing. Within the guidelines, Manitoba Pork claims that over 85% of Manitoba's pigs are already group housed, however this statistic is mainly referring to nursery and finishing barns that hold piglets. Thus, this is not an accurate representation of how sows in Manitoba are currently housed. In fact, according to the *National Sow Housing Conversion Project*, only 20% of Canada's 1.3 million sows are currently housed in groups.

Industry reports stress that group housing conversion must not decrease overall sow productivity. Producers are then encouraged to choose a floor plan and model that best fits their needs and stocking density capabilities. Gestation crates were historically justified and deemed critical by producers, as a way to protect sows from aggressive attacks among each other. However, research shows that *"When given enough space and opportunity many sows prefer to retreat and avoid perceived threats by group mates. Newly grouped sows may spend fewer than 10 minutes actually fighting and in a well-designed pen very little, if any, fighting should occur after the first day (Gonyou and Lang, 2013)"*

The Winnipeg Humane Society acknowledges that transitioning an industrialized livestock operation to a group housing model is a huge undertaking. Though the emphasis in Canada's hog industry has historically been to achieve maximum productivity, it is crucial to note that group housing is only one aspect of ensuring high welfare standards for pigs. For instance, research has shown that when given the option, sows prefer *"environments enriched with materials of 'biological value' that they can manipulate by chewing, rooting or both (Elmore Pittman et al, 2011)."*

Similar reports show that slatted and concrete floors leave sows *'less fit and therefore more prone to locomotion problems and injuries associated with physical activity and fighting on concrete and slatted floors (Rioja-Lang et al., 2013 )'*. Furthermore, *'solid floors, especially*

*with a compressible surface, would benefit sow soundness and well-being. Where bedding is not available, sow comfort and longevity can be improved with provision of rubber mats (Rioja-Lang et al., 2013)."*

As mentioned above, efforts to shift to group housing do nothing to address the biological desire for pigs to carry out the most basic of instincts. Rooting, wallowing, foraging, nesting, having personal space, and exploring enrichment/intellectual stimuli, are all critical aspects of ensuring proper welfare for any animal, regardless of the species. Despite being instinctive behaviours, such examples continue to be blatantly ignored and dismissed by Manitoba's hog industry, even though pigs are now recognized as the third smartest animal species on the planet.

## **Euthanasia Methods**

Euthanasia methods for compromised pigs are chosen based on the weight and size of the animal to be killed. Approved euthanasia methods as outlined by the American Veterinary Medical Association, are highlighted in NFACC's *Codes of Practice for Pigs*, which includes the following two methods utilized in Manitoban hog barns:

**"Blunt trauma** - *Blunt trauma can be administered by grasping the hind legs of the piglet and striking the top of the cranium firmly and deliberately against a flat, hard surface. Alternatively, a sharp, firm blow with a heavy blunt instrument to the top of the head over the brain can be used*

**Electrocution** - *Electrocution of animals must be performed using properly-maintained, proven effective, purpose-designed equipment only. The electric current must flow through the brain first, resulting in insensibility and then through the heart which results in cardiac arrest. This can occur either simultaneously in one step, or by using a two-step method with electrocution to the head performed first."*

Numerous countries throughout the world have found the thumping of piglets abhorrent, and have gone on to prohibit it as a method of euthanasia. Simply put, if we wouldn't use it as a way to humanely euthanize a dog, we shouldn't be using on a piglet of equal weight and superior sentience. Secondly, animal advocacy watchdog groups have exposed the inefficiency of thumping piglets, with multiple accounts showing piglets still alive, and not

rendered unconscious after the initial blunt force trauma.

Ex-industry workers have also spoken out against the use of electrocution methods on pigs, and the inability of electrocution to result in insensibility and cardiac arrest, on multiple occasions.

Euthanasia methods such as those mentioned above, are violent acts for any worker to commit. Such violence leaves no room for human error or inefficiency to occur. The very fact that unsuccessful attempts to kill pigs using blunt trauma and electrocution have been recorded on multiple occasions, shows that such methods are too variable, not humane, and not acceptable.

## **Barn Fires**

Barn fires have long affected Manitoba's hog industry, with a total of over 15,000 pigs perishing in barn fires within Manitoba over the past 5 years. Of the 741,560 farm animals killed in barn fires since 2015, roughly 109,080 were pigs. National economic losses were evaluated at a total of roughly \$165,000,000 as a direct result of all damage obtained from barn fires.

It's safe to say that being confined in a burning building with no means of escape is not a humane death. It is a painful, terrifying experience that no human or animal deserves to endure. Despite this, so long as we keep housing thousands of animals under a single roof, alongside highly flammable substances like hay, wood and ammonia, such mass tragedies are guaranteed to continue both locally and nationally.

Going forward, fire classification systems within Manitoba need to start including livestock, and not just the number of employees. The number of animals housed needs to be reduced so as to decrease the number of casualties, and increase chances of survival. There also needs to be an increased number of installations of sprinkler systems, fire alarm systems that detect heat, smoke and motion systems; emergency management plans – including blueprints that clearly define critical features such as electrical sources, water suppliers, fire extinguishers, exits; and sections separated by concrete walls that will dramatically slow the progress of a fire.

## **Animal Welfare Monitoring**

All hog producers are required to be registered with the national Canadian Quality Assurance Program, which includes partaking in the Animal Care Assessment (revised to be PigCARE in 2019) animal welfare monitoring program. Though the Canadian Quality Assurance Program sees certified validators carrying out a scheduled annual assessment, the primary focus is on food safety protocols and hazard reduction. The monitoring of animal welfare, carried out under the PigCARE program, is advertised for producers under the slogan of *'say what you do, do what you say and prove it.'* Essentially, producers are able to fill out paperwork annually, providing details of their animal care practices and protocols. The paperwork is then submitted to a third party for evaluation. Naturally, this type of self-declaration that is based solely on an honour system, leaves multiple opportunities for animal suffering to go unnoticed and undocumented. Such an evaluation leaves no incentive for producers to document violations and red flags within their barns. It is imperative that a proper third party animal welfare auditing system be adopted by industry both provincially and nationally, to ensure that an objective, unbiased evaluation can occur.

## **In Conclusion**

A recent study conducted by the BCSPCA has shown that a lack of transparency and diminished public trust already exists between consumers and industrialized livestock sectors. Naturally, this leaves consumers to question whether or not welfare standards are actually up to par as industry claims. When we add the fact that lay people and animal advocates continue to document husbandry practices showing hogs in distress, it completely contradicts the positive toned rhetoric pushed by the industry. All too frequently, documentation of the treatment of Manitoban and Canadian hogs is disturbing to the general public, and much of it often violates the industry's own standards. It is imperative that a third party has oversight as to what occurs behind closed doors, as industry has demonstrated a total lack of ability to monitor itself thus far. Demands for transparency will only grow as more leading animal welfare organizations speak out against industrialized hog farming, and as the public grows more concerned with how our animals are being raised for food.



## **Our Recommendations**

- Financial aid and subsidy programs should be directed to small scale farms that raise less than 50 hogs annually and provide their pigs with the highest standards of welfare.
- Financial aid and subsidy programs should be directed to small scale slaughterhouse facilities to enable more facilities to be constructed, thus reducing transportation times for animals en route to slaughter.
- Proper anesthetic agents must be required and administered by a licensed veterinarian prior to castration procedures occurring.
- The *Health of Animal Act and Regulations* needs further amendment to restrict the transportation of livestock in extreme heat and cold.
- A re-evaluation of humane euthanasia methods for piglets and adult hogs.
- Legislation reducing transparency and thus public trust in Manitoba's hog industry, should be avoided.
- Tail docking is a painful form of amputation and does not need to occur if proper spacing requirements are followed.
- Space allowances outlined in the NFACC's Codes of Practice For Pigs are much too low and should be significantly increased.
- Floor areas in hog barns must be covered with a thick layer of appropriate bedding material., along with proper enrichment, and outdoor access.
- A third party auditing and evaluation system of hog barns needs to be adopted by industry.

## **Resources:**

<https://www.cpc-ccp.com/hog-farm-data>

<https://www.cpc-ccp.com/trade-report>

<https://www.cpc-ccp.com/pigcare>

<https://www.manitobapork.com/images/producers/pdfs/On-Farm-Euthanasia-of-Swine.pdf>

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/markets-and-statistics/livestock-statistics/pubs/ag-sector-hog-accessible.pdf>

<https://thepigsite.com/articles/sow-management-how-many-litters-sow-should-i-be-targeting>

<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=3002&context=etd>

<https://farmscape.ca/f2ShowScript.aspx?i=27331>

<https://www.inspection.gc.ca/animal-health/humane-transport/then-vs-now-humane-transportation-regulations/eng/1550521526833/1550521527082>

<https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/3818889/welfare-of-pigs-in-the-european-union.pdf>

[https://calgaryherald.com/news/national/screams-can-last-for-hours-report-calls-for-action-on-canadas-barn-fires?](https://calgaryherald.com/news/national/screams-can-last-for-hours-report-calls-for-action-on-canadas-barn-fires?fbclid=IwAR2fkGMP1aD8oZ2XBCnNc6Q_EhdsdfjYx9LlnP01s5Kn2GylVPT4a9u1410)

[fbclid=IwAR2fkGMP1aD8oZ2XBCnNc6Q\\_EhdsdfjYx9LlnP01s5Kn2GylVPT4a9u1410](https://calgaryherald.com/news/national/screams-can-last-for-hours-report-calls-for-action-on-canadas-barn-fires?fbclid=IwAR2fkGMP1aD8oZ2XBCnNc6Q_EhdsdfjYx9LlnP01s5Kn2GylVPT4a9u1410)

[http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba\\_Pubs/hogproduction.pdf](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba_Pubs/hogproduction.pdf)

<https://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/pig-code#appendixn>