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GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Australia moves toward phasing out the use of sow gestation stalls

Report Categories:

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Livestock and Products
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Report Highlights:

Australian pork producers have claimed to be the first in the world to vote to voluntarily phase out gestation stalls by 2017.

General Information:

Australian pork producers have claimed to be the first in the world to vote to voluntarily phase out gestation stalls by 2017. The decision, which was announced on November 8 2010, is estimated at a cost of AU\$95 million. The industry is asking for assistance from regulators, stakeholders, retailers, consumers and the general community. In voting to phase out gestations stalls, the industry says it recognizes the argument against gestation stalls has moved beyond science and seeks to address what the industry calls "growing unrest among customers".

The animal welfare code for pigs (3rd edition) was developed by the Animal Welfare Working Group (representing both industry and government) in consultation with state and federal governments. The existing code, allows for a sow to be confined in a stall for a maximum of six weeks during gestation.

The Australian Federal government relies on its animal welfare codes to maintain welfare standards of farm animals in Australia. While the codes are mostly voluntary, state governments can enforce them through state law (as well as enforcing and implementing their own state laws).

The Tasmanian state government has moved to ban the six week maximum allowed under the national code in 2014, prior to the industry's 2017 phase out. The early phase out of the 6 week maximum in Tasmania was criticized by industry who suggested that scientific advice did not support the early phase out.

Coles, Australia's second largest food retailer, announced it intends to sell only sow stall free pork by 2014. Coles has written to its pork suppliers (approximately 50) seeking support in implementing the phase out. Animal welfare groups have supported the recent announcement by Coles.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has stated it does not support the removal of sow stalls. Based on the available scientific evidence, the AVA supports the use of sow stalls for the first four to six weeks of gestation as outlined in the animal welfare code. The AVA states the benefits of sow stalls as eliminating; competition for food; fighting and stress.

Australian pork producers are concerned that the sourcing of sow stall free pork will not be applied equally to imported pork. Australia currently imports significant quantities of pork from the US, Canada and Denmark. Industry is asking Coles to apply the policy consistently across their whole range of pork products, including imported and domestically produced pork. Denmark is on track to phase out gestation stalls by 2013 according to government sources.

According to news reports Riverlea, Australia's largest pork producer, has already begun removing stalls for pregnant sows. The company decided to remove the stalls back in 2007 and is on track to be completed in 2014. The removal is reported to have cost Riverlea AU\$16 million. According to the report, Riverlea is a major supplier to Woolworths, Australia's largest food retailer.

Post advises that this report refers only to the use of sow stalls during gestation, and does not refer to farrowing crates used during farrowing.