

Brussels, 26 April 2012

## Questions and Answers on the upcoming ban on individual sow stalls

### What is the relevant piece of legislation?

The Directive 2008/120/EC lays down minimum standards for the protection of pigs. The ban of individual sow stalls was decided in 2001 with the adoption of a specific Directive on the welfare of pigs. A transitional period of 12 years was allowed to adapt to the new systems. From 1 January 2013, sows will have to be kept in groups rather than in individual stalls during approximately the first 2 months and a half of their pregnancy.

### Why this new EU requirement on animal welfare?

The ban on sow stalls comes in response to stakeholders' demand – in particular EU citizens/consumers – to improve food quality and animal health. It represents a milestone for animal welfare and was decided jointly by the Member States, Commission and the Parliament on the basis of **strong scientific evidence** that the welfare of sows is severely compromised when they are confined in single sow stalls unable to move much. With this decision, pigs will be moved from individual narrow stalls to more welfare-friendly systems. The new farming system clearly increases the survival rate of newborn piglets.

### Who will benefit from this ban?

Consumer surveys indicate that EU consumers are concerned about animal welfare when they buy food. The requirement for group housing of sows and gilts will contribute to improving the welfare of pigs.

By implementing the higher welfare standards that were agreed upon nearly twelve years ago, consumer confidence in EU decision making shall increase.

The ban will ensure that food produced in the EU is of high quality, so benefiting consumer's health while achieving higher animal welfare standards. European consumers have a right to quality food.

Furthermore, it is likewise imperative that those farmers who have already made financial investments to enable group housing of sows are not disadvantaged by unfair competition from those who have not made the transition.

The producers themselves will benefit, due to the link between animal welfare and animal health and the expected positive impact thereof on food quality.

### **Who is responsible for what?**

Member States are primarily responsible for the implementation of Council Directive 2008/120/EC.

The Commission intends to stress to Member States the importance of urgently taking all the necessary measures to ensure compliance with Council Directive 2008/120/EC and to continue providing transparent and harmonised data on the implementation of group housing of sows.

The Commission has informed Member States that, as for the "laying hens" Directive earlier this year, it will not hesitate to open infringement proceedings against Member States not in compliance with the Directive on the protection of pigs by 1 January 2013.

### **How are the Member States doing with regard to implementing the requirement for group housing of sows?**

The Commission is closely monitoring the situation in the Member States.

Three Member States (UK, Sweden and Luxembourg) already comply and keep sows in groups.

It is estimated that 16 Member States plan to fully comply by 1 January 2013.

Several Member States will have to make significant efforts to be able to fully comply by the legal deadline.

### **Can we expect a similar situation as that we are now experiencing concerning battery cages for hens?**

The Commission has an implementation plan in place for 2012. All the tools available at EU level are being used to put pressure on the Member States so they comply by the legal deadline.

These tools include:

- Collecting data,
- Increasing communication on the issue (a meeting with stakeholders and Member States to explore further solutions was held on 19 March 2012 in Brussels),
- Disseminating information about potential financial support available at EU level in the framework of the rural development programmes,
- Training of veterinarians,
- Preparatory work in order to be ready to launch infringement procedures against non-compliant Member States as from 1 January 2013.

However, the Commission can only take actions within the remit of its competences as laid down in the Treaties and Member States are primarily responsible for implementing EU welfare legislation.

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