

Farrowing crate briefing

There is growing pressure within Westminster to ban farrowing crates for pigs, with Sir David Amess MP's Pig Husbandry (Farrowing) Bill seeking to phase out the use of farrowing crates by 2027.

The Bill claims that 'numerous alternatives' exist that offer better welfare for the sow and give piglet mortality rates as low as or lower than crates with improved productivity. NFUS however believes that whilst significant progress has been made in alternative farrowing systems, the reality is not so straightforward.

The claims that freedom farrowing systems can give piglet mortality rates as low or lower than those seen in crates, is misleading. True freedom farrowing in indoor systems still result in increased mortality amongst piglets. The systems that can deliver lower piglet mortality are temporary confinement systems, where the sow is crated for the first 5 days after farrowing but thereafter the crate is opened, or removed, allowing freedom with her piglets. It is important to be clear what type of system is really being considered under the Bill.

Freedom farrowing and temporary confinement systems require more space than farrowing crates meaning, to adopt freedom farrowing systems across the UK pig herd would require a significant increase in shed space. This would require substantial investment across an industry that is unsupported and currently battling against low pork prices and high feed and input costs. The barriers to expansion are not just financial, there are considerable planning issues to overcome and staff safety/availability needs that must also be considered.

The upfront investment needed for the change would be significant and such investment can only be made if there is support and confidence in the future market. This would need much broader thinking and promises of support from other sectors.

- There would need to be commitment from retailers and customers that they will support the move and are willing to pay more for the pork and not allow it to be undercut by cheaper imports.
- Government will need to commit to facilitating the necessary expansion needed in sites and develop access to workers through provision of immigration processes for these types of workers.

The proposals highlight the progressive approach taken by the UK in 1999, when it banned the use of gestational stalls and tethers. This ban was introduced 13 years ahead of the phasing in of a similar ban across the rest of Europe and was extremely damaging to the UK industry which halved in size as a direct result, Government needs to learn from this. NFUS recognises the political pressure to make changes to deliver higher welfare, but these decisions cannot be made without considering the wider factors in play and pieces of the puzzle that are required for such a change to be successful.

To see the full NFUS briefing paper see:

<https://www.nfus.org.uk/nfuscontent/business-guides/17699/pig-husbandry-farrowing-bill>