

Brussels, 9 November 2001

The Commission adopts further standards for the welfare of pigs

The Commission today adopted a Directive amending the annex to the Council Directive of 1991 laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs. This annex sets out certain technical requirements for the farming of pigs. These amendments will improve the general conditions for the rearing of pigs such as noise level, light conditions and water supply as well as specific provisions for the various categories of pigs.

On 23 October 2001, the Council already adopted a Directive amending the general framework of the 1991 Directive laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs. The new rules remedy the main welfare problems identified in a science-based Commission report on intensive pig farming. They prohibit the confinement of pregnant pigs to individual stalls and tethering of sows and gilts. The amended Directive also sets rules to improve the living environment of pigs and piglets, such as a minimum size of sow pens, and requires permanent access to rooting materials and fibre food.

In addition to these new rules, the Commission has now adopted, after a unanimous favourable opinion of the Standing Veterinary Committee, a Directive which amends the technical annex of the 1991 Council Directive. The new annex introduces improved standards in the following areas:

- light requirements and maximum noise levels
- permanent access to materials for rooting
- permanent access to fresh water
- additional restrictive conditions on mutilations on pigs
- minimum weaning age of four weeks

As consequence of today's decision noise level in pig holdings will be kept under 85 decibel, pigs must be kept in light conditions with an intensity of at least 40 lux for a minimum period of 8 hours per day and they will have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of straw or other suitable materials. Moreover, fresh water must be available at all times.

The Directive sets additional restrictive conditions for certain interventions such as castration, shortening of corner teeth and tail docking. In particular the worst forms of castration will be prohibited. These techniques shall only be used in very exceptional circumstances and the keeper of the animals is obliged to take all preventive measures to possibly avoid them. Furthermore the Directive stresses the importance of the skills of the persons carrying out those interventions.

Specific provisions for the various categories of pigs are also part of the Directive. The size of boar pens, farrowing conditions for sows and gilts and conditions for weaners and rearing pigs kept in groups are examples of these provisions. Another improvement in this area concerns the weaning age for piglets, which is increased to four weeks.

The Member States have to apply the new requirements from 1 January 2003 on.