

Woolworths supports banning of gestation crates

The National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA) has been working with retailers and industry to promote the abolishment of gestation crates in South Africa by 2016. Now Woolworths has pledged to support the abolishment of these narrow metal crates with bare floors, currently used for pregnant sows in the intensive pork farming industry.



The NSPCA made known its opposition to the practice of crating in 2006, during discussions with the South African Pork Producers' Organisation (SAPPO), insisting the practise be phased out before 2011.

SAPPO and the NSPCA subsequently came to a deadlock during a meeting where the phase out date was discussed. SAPPO stated that it has committed to a phase out by 2020, but the NSPCA remained firm on the 2016 deadline.

"The deadline has already been extended from 2011 to 2016. We feel that industry does not require four more years to remove bars or provide an open pen system to provide sufficient space for a pregnant sow," says Nazareth Appalsamy, national inspector of the Farm Animal Protection Unit at the NSPCA. "We applaud Woolworths for its commitment to the welfare of animals and its commitment to its consumers. We have also been in talks with other large retailers, who are also showing their support in meeting the 2016 deadline."

"Woolworths supports the council's desire to see the use of sow stalls phased out by 2016. As a relatively minor player in the pork market, however, we cannot transform the supply chain alone," says Zyda Rylands, MD of food at Woolworths. "We will continue to work with the industry and our own suppliers to find sustainable ways of phasing out the practice."

"According to research conducted in 1994, group housing for dry sows is beneficial to their welfare and the farmers' bottom line," said National Farm Animal unit manager, Andries Venter, referring to Animal Welfare 1994, 3:97-105.

Bodily damage, stress in sows

The crating of sows during pregnancy has already been banned in the UK, Sweden, Switzerland and some US states. The phasing out period in the EU ended in 2012. In South Africa, pregnant sows are kept in gestation crates for most of their

pregnancy, about 107 days.

The practice of using gestation crates has been shown to cause an elevated risk of urinary tract infections, weakened bones, overgrown hooves and lameness of the sows. The restriction has also been shown to induce stereotypies; repetitive movements, such as rocking back and forth or swaying. Crated pigs are shown to exhibit chronic stress manifested by increased cortisol concentrations.

The council's Farm Animal Unit embarked on a public campaign in February 2013, where the practice was brought to the attention of the consumers, with several industry role players being bombarded by public emails. Support the campaign [here](#).

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>