

Livestock Care Standards Advisory Council meeting minutes

September 5, 2012

Attendees:

Dr. Kristin M. Haas (KMH), Jane Clifford (JC), Dr. Kent E. Henderson (KEH), Melody Squier (MS), Dr. Ruth Blauwiekel (RB), Diane Bothfeld (DB), Leslie Pike (LP), Marcy Wisnowski (MW), Tracy Simon (TS), Greg Finch (GF), Jessica Danyow (JD).

Observers (affiliations):

Joanne Bourbeau (Humane Society of the United States), Dottie Nelson (consumer and animal advocate), Carrie Abeles (Humanitarian website and *Local Banquet*)

DB called the meeting to order at 9:10 AM.

Council members present introduced themselves to those in attendance, and two new members, Greg Finch and Tracy Simon, were welcomed to the Council. Mr. Finch was appointed by the Committee on Committees to the Council to fill the category of “producer of species other than bovidae”, and Ms. Simon was appointed as “a person with experience investigating charges of livestock animal cruelty” by the Speaker of the House. Both individuals were appointed to 3 year terms

During the public comment period, Dottie Nelson provided her opinion of gestation crates to the Council, and Carrie Abeles requested that the public comment periods during the LCSAC meetings be moved to the end of the meeting in order to allow public observers to comment on the content of the meeting.

LP moved to approve the minutes from the April 5, 2012 meeting. RB seconded the motion. A discussion regarding the placement of the public comment period followed, and the Council agreed by consensus to move the public comment period to the time slot immediately prior to the break for all subsequent meetings. The April minutes were unanimously approved.

Council member terms were discussed. Two members’ terms ended in August (CC and CD), and a third member’s (JC) status was unclear. KH agreed to follow up with CC and CD, as well as the Governor’s office (appointing authority) to determine whether these two members are interested in renewing their terms. KH agreed to review the records relating to JC’s appointment in order to clarify her status and follow up with JC after that review.

KH informed Council members that the VAAF website upgrade is expected to go live by mid-September 2012. This site will be able to be a clearing house for educational materials and other resources related to livestock well-being that the Council would like to make available to the general public.

KH requested that any information that is emailed by Council members for the purpose of being distributed to the entire Council be sent directly to all Council members at once using the current email distribution list. This is in lieu of sending information to KH, who then has to redistribute that information to all members. Council members should be respectful of one another and not use this distribution list for solicitations or other unrelated business.

The Council engaged in a robust discussion, at the request of the House Agriculture committee, about the bill that was proposed during the 2012 legislative session that would ban the use of swine gestation crates in Vermont. The discussion encompassed many aspects of this issue including the following points:

- Statistics related to current use of this housing system by Vermont producers
 - GF explained that in Vermont, the housing systems range from 100% outdoor housing to indoor facilities where sows are kept in pens. The most common type of housing management utilized in Vermont is a mixed indoor/outdoor with varied types of buildings.
 - He is not aware of any Vermont producers that utilize gestation crates for housing of pregnant sows, but he stated that some VT producers use gestation crates as temporary housing during feeding in order to reduce feeding time aggressiveness between animals.
- The impact of gestation crates and other group and individual housing systems on the behavior, reproductive efficiency, and physical well-being of the animals
 - Much of the documented research currently available on this topic is outdated; it is important to find more current research on which to base decisions.
 - Dr. Harry Snelson, Director of Communications for the American Association of Swine Veterinarians, and Dr. Alex Ramirez, Iowa State University Veterinary Swine Specialist, have agreed to act as resources for the Council during further discussion if requested. Council members stated that there probably are other individuals who could serve in the same capacity and that it would be good to identify and solicit them for their opinions on the sow housing issue.
 - The documented research that is available and can be accessed during literature reviews does not offer a consistent conclusion regarding sow housing recommendations – there are advantages and disadvantages to the use of gestation crates, and the criteria that are used to measure sow well-being are varied. They include reproductive efficiency, incidence of stereotypic behaviors, life span, physiologic parameters, incidence of disease in a herd, incidence of

injuries/wounds, marketability and others. A Council member requested that the position statements of the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Swine Veterinarians be entered into the record; they are included at the end of this document. Additionally, pertinent documents were forwarded to the Council by individual members prior to the meeting. They can be accessed by following the links below:

- [www.ncifap.org/ images/PCIFAPFin.pdf](http://www.ncifap.org/images/PCIFAPFin.pdf)
 - [http://www.ncifap.org/ images/PCIFAPSmry.pdf](http://www.ncifap.org/images/PCIFAPSmry.pdf)
 - http://www.cast-science.org/publications/?scientific_assessment_of_the_welfare_of_dry_sows_kept_in_individual_accommodations&show=product&productID=2945
- The pros and cons of housing swine indoors
 - Swine were originally moved indoors in order to help with parasite control, increase reproductive efficiency, prevent disease and reduce the incidence of injuries and wounds secondary to fighting. These are potential benefits to housing swine indoors, regardless of the specific housing structure.
 - There are disadvantages to housing swine indoors, including potentially less ability for animals to express innate behaviors like rooting and foraging, capital investment/infrastructure maintenance, and waste management challenges. Waste management challenges are tied to farm permitting handled by the ARM Division of VAAFM. DB agreed to obtain the livestock numbers associated with the permitting of each of the farm size categories (large farm operations, medium farm operations) and provide them to Council members for further review.
 - The bigger picture considerations related to swine gestation crates and legislating a ban of them
 - Gestation crates are a management tool that can be used by swine producers and that have some benefits.
 - The implementation of a useful management tool is largely dependent on the humans that are utilizing the tool.
 - We should be careful about taking away a management tool from a good producer.

- Consideration of the economic impact on producers is important when discussing the merits of gestation crates because economics are tied to welfare, economic considerations should not overshadow the welfare of the swine; swine well-being needs to be the priority.
- The Vermont Brand is important as it relates to marketability and sales of pork products in Vermont, regionally, nationally and globally. Some producers who raise their swine in certain ways (i.e. house them outdoors or in group pens) can get a premium for their resultant food products, so industry and consumers currently have a real influence on the decisions that producers make regarding swine management and housing.
- There are pros and cons to legislating issues related to livestock well-being, and many of the same issues that were brought up in this meeting have been expressed during previous meetings' discussions of other topics.

Council members also expressed a desire to be able to discuss and offer recommendations on all livestock housing issues rather than only focusing on swine housing. There are benefits to being able to be proactive on these issues through the offering of educational and other outreach materials, rather than only reacting to proposed legislation when it is brought before the Secretary or committees on agriculture.

A conclusion was not reached by the Council on the issue of swine gestation crates. The Council agreed by consensus that it would be helpful to schedule another meeting prior to the December quarterly meeting to allow for additional input from experts on this topic. Council members believe that this additional expert feedback is important in order to reach a conclusion that is based on current, science-based research and experience. The date/time proposed for this meeting is November 14th from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM in a location TBD. As an alternative, this could be done on December 6th in lieu of the quarterly meeting, and the quarterly meeting could be rescheduled to a date/time to coincide with the beginning of the legislative session. The goals of this additional meeting would be to determine what the current scope is of the pork industry in Vermont and in what direction is the industry headed. DB stated that she would consult with VAAFM legal counsel to identify what level of public involvement in the meeting is necessary, but the focus of the meeting will be for Council members to receive input from expert stakeholders on this topic. The meeting will not serve as a forum for public debate of the topic. Potential meeting invitees and Council members assigned to follow up with them include:

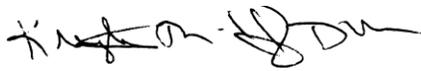
- Veterinary experts already identified in these minutes – KEH to contact
- In state and regional pork processors – KMH and DB to contact
- Researchers in alternative housing systems – JD to contact

- Progressive VT producers who have experience in swine production – MS to contact
- Animal behaviorist or well-being expert – KH to contact
- Legislators from the committees on agriculture – KH and DB to contact
- Economic impact of different types of housing – GF can provide

The Council members agreed to communicate via email status of these outreach initiatives so that the meeting may be organized.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:57 AM.

Respectively submitted,



Kristin M. Haas, DVM

Pregnant Sow Housing

(Approved by the AVMA Executive Board November 2011)

Pregnant sows are kept in a variety of housing systems. Sow housing and management systems should:

- Provide every animal access to appropriate food and water;
- Promote good air quality and allow proper sanitation;
- Protect sows from environmental extremes;
- Reduce exposure to hazards that result in injuries, pain, or disease;
- Facilitate the observation of individual sows to assess their welfare;
- Allow sows to express normal patterns of behavior.

There are advantages and disadvantages to any sow housing system. Appropriate training is required for any management system to accommodate the welfare of the sow. Gestation stall systems may minimize aggression and injury, reduce competition, and allow individual feeding and nutritional management, assisting in control of body condition. Stall systems restrict normal behavioral expression. Group housing systems are less restrictive but allow aggressive and competitive behaviors that could be detrimental to individual sows. Genetics and breed selection could promote good sow welfare by matching animals to the appropriate housing system. To

address animal welfare in the long term, advantages of current housing systems should be retained while making improvements in design to overcome problems identified.

The AVMA encourages research into housing systems for pregnant sows that improve their welfare.

AASV Position Statement: Pregnant Sow Housing

The American Association of Swine Veterinarians supports the use of sow housing configurations that:

- Minimize aggression and competition between sows;
- Protect sows from detrimental effects associated with environmental extremes, particularly temperature extremes;
- Reduce exposure to hazards that result in injuries;
- Provide every animal with daily access to appropriate food and water; and
- Facilitate observation of individual sow appetite, respiratory rate, urination and defecation, and reproductive status by caretakers.

Current scientific literature indicates that individual gestation stalls meet each of the aforementioned criteria, provided the appropriate level of stockmanship is administered.

Prepared by the AASV Pig Welfare Committee and approved by the AVMA HOD July 2002