

Questions on piglet castration

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General remarks		In Ireland we do not castrate pigs. They are slaughtered at low weights (ca. 90 kg) thereby eliminating the risk of boar taint.			Castrated pigs in the Netherlands have received general anaesthesia with CO2 since 2009. An increasing number of Dutch pig farmers have stopped castrating their male piglets. The percentage of entire male pigs increased from 5% in 2009, 45% in 2011, to approximately 65% by early 2014. In May 2013, the Dutch Foodstuffs Trade Organisation posted a message which referred to the fact that Dutch supermarkets would no longer sell meat from castrated pigs as of 1 January 2014. --> See progress report on ending surgical castration of pigs within the EU by Dr. Backus and others.	the legal framework in Austria says that castration of piglets is allowed without anaesthesia if piglets are not older than 7 days. But this might be changed in the near future. Boar fattening and immunocastration is allowed/possible in Austria, but according to my knowledge this is practically not done.		Castration is not illegal in the UK but farm assurance schemes do not allow it under their rules and as the majority of pigs are reared and slaughtered under such schemes it is in effect unlikely to occur widely. Where it is still practiced is in small herds/reared and should follow the EU requirements as to first 7 days of life etc. 2008/120/EC. Certainly in the case of pet pigs anaesthesia and analgesia is used. Practically the aspect of 2008/120/EC that gives the biggest problem is the requirement, "castration of male pigs by other means than tearing of tissues", as this is difficult to achieve and certainly to enforce, in the full meaning of the language expressed, in under seven day older pigs and may not even be desirable to be achieved as an aspect of tearing is to reduce blood loss. In the older pig where ligation is required it is undertaken by vets. Immunosuppression had not been adopted as it is not accepted by many assurance schemes and hence retailers.		Since January 1st 2009, the castration of male piglets in Switzerland can only be carried out under anaesthesia. Today, in order to prevent boar taint, about 98% of male piglets in Switzerland are castrated surgically under general anaesthesia with isoflurane and a painkiller. Two other methods are currently available to prevent boar taint in pig meat, namely vaccinating male pigs to block the compounds responsible for boar taint or the slaughter of young entire males. All three methods are suitable from a legal point of view, are economically viable, can guarantee high meat quality and are acceptable to the consumers.
Is piglet castration regulated by law in your country?	yes		yes	yes		yes			yes	yes
Boar fattening: authorised and performed?	yes (4%)		no (98%)	yes (1%)		Theoretisch/gesetzlich möglich, aber in der Praxis so gut wie nicht vorhanden; Anforderungen an die Haltung sowie Vermarktungskette sind offene Diskussionspunkte für die Praxis; Zusätzlich ist Geruchsabweichung auch ein rechtliches Problem.			yes (1%)	yes <1%
Surgical castration with anaesthesia: authorised and performed?	yes		no (99%)	yes (94%)		Üblicherweise Kastration ohne Betäubung, weil Meikamente nicht an Landwirte abgegeben werden, muss daher vom Tierarzt durchgeführt werden (Kosten);			yes (93%)	yes 98%
Surgical castration without anaesthesia: authorised and performed?	yes		yes (99%)	no		Eingriff ohne Betäubung ist bei Ferkeln bis zu einer Woche erlaubt. Es gibt eine freiwillige Branchenvereinbarung zum Einsatz von Schmerzmitteln und eine aktuelle Debatte über eine Gesetzesänderung.	In Denmark the legislation permits that piglets are castrated without general anaesthesia, as long as the are given pain relief.		no	no
Immunocastration with vaccination: authorised and performed?	yes (15%)		yes (2%)	yes (5%)		So gut wie nicht praktiziert in Ö; Improvac ist zugelassen, Impfung aber nur durch Tierarzt, derzeit keine Abgabe an Landwirt möglich; Vermarktungskette in der Praxis "unklar"			yes (6%)	yes < 2%
What is your experience with the different methods? -Regarding animal welfare	There have been good experiences with immunocastration as well as intact boars. Sometimes we hear of problems with aggression with the intact boars, but the problems will probably be solved when the pig keepers gain some more experience.			Swedish pig farmers are generally reluctant to use fattening of boars, since boar behaviour is considered to be very detrimental to animal welfare. Surgical castration with anaesthesia improves animal welfare markedly - piglets are calmer, do not struggle or squeak at castration and more quickly move to the sow for suckling. Surgical castration without anaesthesia is a painful procedure beyond acceptance. Analgesia may reduce post-surgical pain, but has no effect on pain at castration. Immunocastration is highly beneficial to animal welfare compared to all other methods.		Es gab 2014/15 eine breite Stakeholder Debatte zum Thema Eingriffe bei Nutztieren, wo u.a. die verschiedenen Alternativen zur gängigen Praxis der Ferkelkastration diskutiert und bewertet wurden. Aktuell wird eine gesetzliche Neuregelung auch im Bereich der Ferkelkastration diskutiert (s. Anhang).			In my opinion both castration with anaesthesia (in Norway done by mandatory administration of local anaesthesia and also long acting analgesia by injection, typically NSAIDs) and immunocastration are superior to surgical castration without anaesthesia with regards to animal welfare. Of the alternatives used in Norway, immunocastration is in my opinion the superior alternative with regards to animal welfare.	After seven years of experience with castration with anaesthesia to prevent boar taint (98%) incl. painkiller, it is time to compare this method with already established, alternative methods that may be more animal welfare friendly like correct immunocastration
What is your experience with the different methods? -Regarding correct performance	These methods seem to pose no problems regarding the correct performance.			Boar fattening requires skill and much handling of boars in order to prevent boar behaviour. In Sweden, surgical castration with anaesthesia is performed by laymen, education required. After education, anaesthesia is in a majority of cases performed correctly, which of course is a presumption for animal welfare, as is correct time span between injection and castration. This too seems to work well. Surgical castration without anaesthesia is no longer allowed in Sweden since January 1st 2016. Immunocastration: Effect of vaccination easily controlled through behaviour and scrotum size.					Correct performance is in my opinion much more easily evaluated by surgical castration than immunocastration. The inherent difficulties on on-farm evaluation of correct immunocastration in combination with the difficulties of establishing a reliable, sensitive, specific and rapid pen-side/slaughterline test on effect of immunocastration/presence of boar taint are in my opinion the major reasons why immunocastration is not used more in Norway.	correct castration under general anaesthesia with isoflurane is very challenging. It is difficult to control, whether the anaesthesia is performed correctly by the Farmers, who are allowed to perform the surgical intervention, if they have absolved and documented an appropriate training. Besides this inhalation anaesthesia with isoflurane requires a demanding equipment, which has to be properly maintained. Because of this experiences immunocastration is in my opinion the superior alternative with regards to animal welfare.