

Is the Market ready?



Gé Backus
Connecting Agri & Food

Setting the stage

Castration is a difficult and complex issue, whereby we observe

- Strong stakeholder opinions, not bothered by knowledge
- Lack of information sharing and provision of incentives within the supply chain
- No clarity on equitable distribution of costs and returns across chain partners

At the same time we are making more and more progress to end castration

- Scientific evidence on the do's and don'ts
- Clarity about what the market wants in terms of quality specifications
- Major pork supply chains successfully introduced market concepts, supported by
 - Genetic programs that have substantially reduced boar taint prevalence
 - The fact that farm level feed cost for non castrated pigs turned out to be lower

The last decade (2010 – 2020)

- Large differences exist between countries in producing and marketing non-castrated pigs
- The UK, Ireland, Spain and Portugal have a long tradition with entire males
- In the last decade, companies in The Netherlands and Belgium have made a strategic move
- Also in France and Germany the number of non castrated pigs gradually increased
- But in several other countries there is still no or little sense of urgency to end castration

We have learned that

Realizing market acceptance depends on boar taint and fat quality

- Consequent detection for boar taint as a safety net at the slaughter line is crucial
- Farm level management and housing system can play supportive role, but not replace detection
- With less backfat thickness some carcasses become too lean and less suitable (e.g. dry hams)
- And, fatty acid composition influences fat firmness
- For both boar taint and fat quality preventive measures are available (e.g. genetics and feed)
- Perceptions exist on vaccination and boar taint

Product specifications

Fat quality

- Lean carcasses should have >12 mm back fat thickness for marketing dry hams
- Bellies should have <15% poly unsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), and Iodine value < 70

Boar taint prevalence

- Sufficiently low percentages (2-3%) enable masking strategies to be an effective tool

Farmers will be induced to implement effective genetics and feeding measures, with appropriate incentives and an equitable distribution of costs and returns. This is easier within integrated supply chains.

Remaining issues

Intrinsic quality

- Outdoor housing provides higher risk of boar taint prevalence
- Additional to focus on feed efficiency, incentives on fat quality are needed

Extrinsic quality

- Perception by market actors in third (Asian) markets
- Consumer perceptions i.r.t. vaccination

Concluding comments

- Ending piglet castration long-term and complex process,
- Unraveling reactions consumers on meat from non-castrated pigs
- Only supply chain wide solutions will really work
- Pork supply chains better and better equipped to become successful

- Still some open ends
 - Potential of available knowledge not fully utilized
 - Role of feeding as a direction for solution not enough in the picture

- FINAL MESSAGE: Objectivity and fact based working are key factors