

Restricting the ability of sows to move: a source of concern for some Brazilians

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Abstract

Gestation stall housing for pregnant sows (*Sus scrofa*) has been, or is being, phased out in many parts of the world in response to public criticism. However, in Brazil, one of the largest global producers and exporters of pork, gestation stall housing is still common. The objective of this study was to explore the views of Brazilians, including participants associated (ALP) or not with livestock production (NotALP), on gestation stall housing. Participants were provided the option of accessing a short text describing the housing system and a video of pregnant sows housed in either individual or group housing. Participants (ALP; $n = 176$, NotALP; $n = 173$) were asked to state their position on housing pregnant sows in individual stalls and to provide the reason(s) justifying their position. More NotALP (87%) participants than ALP (69%) participants rejected individual stalls. More participants (85%) that accessed the optional information rejected the stalls than those (71%) that did not. Qualitative analyses revealed that animal welfare, most often in reference to animal sentience, freedom of movement and ethics, was the main justification given for rejecting gestation stalls. Those in favour of individual stalls justified their position with statements such as improved production, handling and animal health, and reduced aggression. This qualitative, exploratory study, based on a convenience sample of participants, does not represent the views of Brazilian society; however, it identified some shared values between participants associated with livestock production and those that are not. Our findings highlight that opposition to gestation stalls for sows reflects an ethical position regarding the treatment of livestock and should not be interpreted as support for group housing in confined systems.

Keywords: animal welfare, gestation stalls, housing, pig production, public views, survey