

National Implications of California's Sow Housing Law

Our topics for this week:

- **Sow confinement during gestation and nursing**
- **California's Proposition 12**
- **Transparency in handling animals effect on handling methods**

All animals develop abnormal behaviors if confined to a small space, especially if there is no form of mental enrichment accessible. The abnormal behaviors are injurious to the confined animal and sometimes to other animals in the confined group. These are called stereotypic behaviors.

Today, the most excessively confined domestic animals are swine, poultry, stallions, and dairy bulls. Stallions and bulls are confined in near isolation due to concern of injury to themselves and their handler. Swine and poultry are confined to small spaces to increase profits. The most extreme confinement of swine involves gestating and nursing sows. Farrowing crates are 2 ft wide and 7 ft long for a sow. This leaves just enough space for the sow to stand. Confinement to a farrowing crate is usually 1 week before farrowing until 3-4 weeks after farrowing for a total of about 5 months for each pregnancy. The standard reason given for using farrowing crates is to prevent sows from crushing pigs, but the data on effectiveness in protecting pigs is variable and usually not compared to methods that permit more freedom of movement for the sows and pigs. Extreme confinement of gestating sows does decrease costs for producers however. Stereotypic behaviors and other undesirable effects associated with farrowing crates are aggression, difficulty in maintaining a normal body temperature, bar biting, tongue rolling, and head weaving.

The popularity of free range egg production and sales has soared in the last decade. A major reason for this was the 2008 passage of Proposition 2 in California which banned battery cages for layer hens and gestation crates for sows in California by 2015. This was followed by the passage of another ballot measure in 2010 banning the in-state of California sale of eggs from hens confined to battery cages, regardless of the state of origin.

Another ballot initiative, called Proposition 12, was passed in California which bans the sale of pork products in California from producers in any state that do not provide at least 24 sq. ft. for gestating and nursing sows. Proposition 12 has been challenged by other pork producing states, including Missouri, who do not wish to require at least 24 sq. ft. per sow. Proposition 12 was

challenged by in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and the appeal was rejected. The case is now before the Supreme Court.

If Proposition 12 is withheld by the Supreme Court, pork producers in other states who wish to sell their products in California will have to provide at least 24 sq. ft. for gestating sows. The California initiative banning battery cages for laying hens revolutionized the national egg production methods by educating the public to more humane care of chickens. Proposition 12 may do the same for pork products.

Transparency is the key to humane animal handling. Market pressures are the most effective driving force for better livestock handling.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Prolonged containment of sows in farrowing/gestation crates causes stereotypic behaviors.**
- 2. Farrowing crates are not the best way to prevent crushing of piglets.**
- 3. California's Proposition 12 may initiate national reforms in the containment of sows.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and available from all major science book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 150 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.