



Farmwatch IncurSION – What do we have to say?

In March this year, a vegan lobby group, 'Farmwatch', broke into a pig farm in Canterbury. The conditions found were not within industry standards and are not condoned by NZPork. However, at the time the activists broke into the farm it had already been identified as below industry required standards and a process had begun to fix the issues. Earlier that month, a routine independent PigCare™ on-farm audit had identified that some of the farm's practices and buildings were below industry standards. As a result, the farm's PigCare™ status had been downgraded from 'Green' and the farm had been issued with a number of corrective actions. Read on for more information...

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What Happened

The standards on this farm are not typical of commercial pig farms in New Zealand. It is very disappointing to the industry that a farm of this standard should exist. Fortunately work was already underway to address the situation through PigCare™, the industry's independent animal welfare audit process.

The New Zealand pork industry has some of the highest welfare standards in the world. In addition to complying with the government animal welfare regulations (Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare 2010), commercial farms use an independent annual audit process, PigCare™, to assess on farm welfare standards and practices and to identify areas for improvement. PigCare™ is independently operated by [AssureQuality](#).

[More about PigCare™](#) or [see what an indoor housing system looks like](#).

Since the farm was broken into, NZPork has spoken with the PigCare™ auditor, the farmer involved, and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) Animal Welfare. The farm involved in the break-in had been audited by a PigCare™ auditor (a qualified veterinarian) earlier that month as part of its' regular audit process. The auditor found that the welfare and health of the animals' was acceptable on the day of the audit. However, the auditor did find that some aspects of the farm buildings and of the recording of health care were not up to the standard required for a 'green' PigCare™ status. Recognising that there were improvements that needed to be made, the farm received an 'amber' rating, a list of corrective actions was provided and a three month deadline in which to fix them.

A few days after the audit, 'FarmWatch' broke into the farm and videoed a sow farrowing (giving birth) in a farrowing crate and pigs in concrete pens.

A few days after the break-in, an image of a dead pig claimed to have been taken on the farm was sent to the MPI with a request that they investigate. An MPI investigation was initiated. Two animal welfare inspectors and a registered vet visited the premises and assessed the farm in relation to the Animal Welfare Act and Code of Welfare (Pigs). The producer was given a list of corrective actions required. A MPI follow up assessment is scheduled for May to confirm that these requirements have been met.

Both MPI and PigCare™ investigators found the farm to be below acceptable standards and began processes to fix the issues. The auditing and investigation processes that are in place had already identified the issues on-farm before the 'Farmwatch' break in.

Over the last few years the New Zealand pork industry has improved the processes that support, evaluate and monitor welfare standards within our industry. Assessing and providing feedback to farmers for on-farm welfare is a process of continual improvement. The conditions depicted in the 'Farmwatch' footage confirm how important it is



to have strong auditing and welfare standards in place. The standards and processes in place in New Zealand ensure that the conditions found by 'Farmwatch' are **not** common in commercial New Zealand pig farming.

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Recent Facts and Fictions

Recently a series of incorrect and misleading statements have been made. NZPork would like to take this opportunity to provide a few facts.

The truth about farrowing crates:

Farrowing stalls are 'extremely cruel'

FALSE - Farrowing crates are the preferred method used internationally to house sows and their newly born piglets and meet the Code of Welfare for Pigs in New Zealand. They provide the best available welfare solution for both sows and piglets in indoor housing systems. They protect piglets from being over laid (squashed) and reduce piglet mortality rates.

'so little room that they essentially fall to the ground with little control when they want to lie down'

FALSE - The design of the farrowing crate enables the sow to lie down slowly, easily and comfortably, with minimal risk to the piglets.

'In farrowing crates pigs are unable to display their normal behaviour'/ 'she (the sow) is unable to properly mother her young'

FALSE - Farrowing stalls are used internationally for protecting newborn piglets from being crushed or suffocated in their first weeks. Sows have access to their own food and water with no competition or bullying from other sows, piglets have a safe, warm environment, free access to their mother and are easily cared for by stock handlers. Piglets feed easily and frequently.

'in the wild a mother sow will display a specific sequence of behaviours ...resulting in lower piglet mortality'.

FALSE – Pigs (whether wild, indoor, outdoor, free range, farrowing crates) do display various patterns of behaviour including those to signify when they are going to lie down. However, data across NZ shows that piglet mortality levels are noticeably higher in farming systems that do not use farrowing crates than in the systems where farrowing crates are used.

'A common cause of death for young piglets is being crushed to death by their mother. It is for this reason that the industry justifies the continued confinement of sows in farrowing crates.' -

TRUE- Farrowing crates are used and accepted internationally as the appropriate welfare solution for both sows and piglets in indoor systems.

The truth about gestation stalls:

'In 2010 the Government reluctantly announced changes to pig farming regulations'

THE FACTS - the New Zealand pork industry had been aware of consumer perceptions of the use of gestation stalls well before 2000. By the time the changes were announced in 2010 the industry had been working on the welfare challenges associated with the change from gestation stall use to group housing **for over a decade**. In 2012 New Zealand became one of only a few countries to commit to the total phase out of gestation stall use by 2015.

The truth about 'Fattening pens':

'They are usually overcrowded, damp and covered in faeces.'



FALSE – the conditions on the farm that ‘Farmwatch’ broke into are not ‘typical’ of our industry, or of the vast majority of indoor farms. The Code of Welfare for pigs minimum standard 6.a requires *‘housing systems to be maintained in a manner that provides comfortable temperature, fresh air and hygienic conditions’*. Hygiene standards must be maintained so as to protect the health and welfare of the pigs - including the level of faecal matter and minimum space requirements. Full versions of the code and the guidelines are available [here](#)

Have a question? NZPork is happy to answer any welfare concern or question you may have – [email us](#)
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PigCare™ and What it Means

The New Zealand pork industry operates at the highest animal welfare standards for pigs in the world. Since 2010 this high level of animal welfare has been monitored through an independently administered welfare audit programme called 'PigCare™'. The PigCare™ Audit ensures that regardless of the farming style used, the pigs are raised in an environment that supports good health and welfare.

Audited farms are accredited to PigCare™ status, Commercial wholesalers buy from PigCare™ accredited farms and retailers use the 100% New Zealand Pork PigCare™ label. So, when consumers buy 100% New Zealand Pork, they know they are supporting good animal welfare.

Whenever an audit finds welfare issues (or potential issues) a process is followed to report, manage and fix these problems. The audit also identifies opportunities for farmers to further improve their on-farm practices. Serious issues identified in the PigCare™ audits mean that the farmer can no longer sell 100% New Zealand Pork.

If necessary, the regulatory body (MPI) is notified and follows its own independent compliance and enforcement processes. For more information on MPI's processes go to <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/animal-welfare>

Our industry continually investigates the best welfare options for farming our pigs and our audit standards are reviewed frequently to make sure they represent best practice. The audit also identifies opportunities for farmers to further improve their practice. In addition to the on-farm PigCare™ audit, the health and wellbeing of every pig sent for slaughter is inspected at the abattoir.

In addition, most commercial farms have a programme of regular veterinary visits. The veterinarians are bound by an ethical standard to remedy any pig health and welfare issues. Cases that breach the Animal Welfare Act, are reported to the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

The PigCare™ programme developed from research at Massey University supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (now MPI) and the RNZSPCA. The PigCare™ programme meets or exceeds the requirements of the Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare 2010 and is administered independently by AsureQuality. The PigCare™ programme is for commercial pork producers and is supported by wholesalers and most retailers, including NZ's two major supermarket chains. The audit documents are freely available for the use of smaller 'lifestyler' farmers' looking to implement good practice.

Pig Care – FAQ's

Q. How do I know farmers are treating their animals properly?

A. The New Zealand pork industry supports New Zealand's world class welfare standards. Pig Care™ status is only granted to audited farmers who comply with its high animal welfare standards. Wholesalers are committing to buying only from PigCare™ accredited farms. Major retailers are using the 100% NZ Pork PigCare™ label. So when you buy 100% New Zealand you support and are assured of good animal welfare.



Q. How do I know that I'm buying NZ pork that complies with the welfare rules/codes?

A. Look for the 100% New Zealand PigCare™ label on pork products. Only 100% New Zealand PigCare™ accredited pork is guaranteed to be from pigs born and raised on NZ

farms. This means they are compliant with New Zealand's stringent food safety standards, free from added growth hormone, and produced according to New Zealand's Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare 2010. Therefore they are able to carry the label. Imported pork does not have to meet NZ's welfare standards.

Q. Is the pork I buy/see in the supermarket from an animal that has lived in a farrowing crate?

A. Fresh 100% New Zealand Pork sold in supermarkets and butchers is from pigs raised for market, and not from breeding stock (sows). These pigs come from a variety of farms and farming styles. Some of these pigs (around 40%) will have come from systems where the breeding herd is farmed outdoors, some will have come from free-farmed or free-range farms, others will have come from farms using farrowing crates as part of their system.

Q. Why can't all pigs 'free-range' or outdoor farmed?

A. Because it is impractical to farm pigs free-range in some regions of New Zealand due to climatic conditions and soil types. However, the Pig Care™ accreditation system in place covers a range of farming methods to ensure they all meet New Zealand's high welfare standards.

Other countries that supply imported pork product to New Zealand, have (and are likely always to have) a far lower proportion of outdoor breeding and free-range pig farms than New Zealand.

Q. How does NZ compare internationally?

A. New Zealand's animal welfare standards are some of the highest in the world. We are one of only a few countries who have committed to phasing out the use of gestation stalls by 2015. Kiwi pig-farmers do not use growth hormones at all and only use antibiotics when necessary for the health and welfare of their pigs.

Q. I've heard that pigs are kept in tiny crates and have awful lives of confinement. Is this true?

A. No, this is absolutely not true. Less than a quarter of New Zealand's sows are housed in gestation stalls during a period in each pregnancy. For the remainder, under current New Zealand welfare standards, gestation stalls can be used a maximum of 4 weeks per pregnancy (this will be phased out by 03 December 2015) and farrowing crates are only used while the sow is farrowing (giving birth) and feeding her piglets.

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Farrowing Crates

Farrowing crates are enclosures specially designed for a sow to give birth (farrow) in and rear her piglets until weaning (4-6 weeks). They are internationally accepted as the best system for reducing piglet mortality and protecting newborn piglets.

A farrowing crate has a purpose-built feed trough and drinker incorporated for the mother (sow). To the side of the farrowing area there is a heated 'creep' area designed for the piglets (the red pad in the photo). The creep area is heated to 30 degrees (the piglets preferred temperature) to keep the piglets warm and safe whilst keeping the sow at her preferred temperature of around 22 degrees. The piglets can go to and from their mother as they like.





Farrowing crates provide piglets with the best chance for survival, protecting them from being smothered or trampled by their mother, allowing sows to access feed without pressure from other sows, and make caring for both sow and piglets safer and easier for farm staff.



Outdoor farmers use a range of designs of farrowing hut or arc. These provide individual accommodation for the sow where she can rest while farrowing. Fewer piglets survive birthing and early life in outdoor systems than in farrowing crate systems. This is why free range or free farmed pork more expensive to produce..

For videos of farrowing crates in action go to:

1. [On-farm farrowing management](#)
2. [Freedom farrowing systems](#)

Information on:

[Pig Farming in New Zealand](#)

[PigCare™ and animal welfare](#)

[Animal Welfare Regulations](#)

[Recipes and consumer information](#)

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