



Position Statement

Sow and Gilt Gestation Housing

Based on animal welfare science, the Veterinary Association for Farm Animal Welfare (VAFAW) recognizes that sows and gilts are social and intelligent animals who experience physical harm and psychological distress when denied the opportunity to express species-typical behaviors. Sows and gilts are unable to fully express these behaviors in intensive confinement.

VAFAW supports group housing systems during breeding and gestation that maximize welfare as outlined by the Five Domains Model:

NUTRITION: VAFAW supports housing systems that minimize inter-sow competition to ensure all animals have access to appropriate feed and clean water. We encourage the implementation of management methods to reduce hunger caused by feed restriction, such as the provision of straw and diets that promote satiety.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: VAFAW supports housing systems that encourage the expression of species-typical environmental engagement, such as exploration, foraging, and rooting; this includes the provision of synchronously accessible enrichment. We encourage outdoor access for all animals to facilitate these natural behaviors. Housing designs should enable sows to divide space into distinct functional zones; this includes opportunities to separate areas of rest



from those established for elimination and opportunities to thermoregulate based on temperature gradients. The housing system must provide environmental conditions that maximize sow comfort and health, including appropriate temperature, air quality, sanitation, and ambient noise levels. Production management must maintain flooring to prevent injury, and provide clean, dry, bedded areas for rest.

HEALTH: VFAFW supports management protocols that promote disease prevention, timely disease detection and treatment, and pain mitigation. Production management must train workers to detect animal pain, disease, and injury and intervene as needed. Designated hospital pens must be provided for animals that require enhanced monitoring or treatment.

BEHAVIORAL INTERACTIONS: VFAFW supports facility designs and management protocols that reduce inter-sow aggression and promote positive social engagement, including appropriate stocking densities, opportunities to escape unwanted interactions, and methods of grouping that mitigate social stress. Production management must provide worker training in stockmanship based on an understanding of sow behavior that ensures appropriate animal handling and movement to minimize fear, distress, and injury.

MENTAL STATE: VFAFW supports housing systems that enhance sow psychological welfare by implementing housing design features and management protocols that mitigate boredom, anxiety, frustration, and stress and promote positive affective states. This includes providing an appropriate quantity and quality of space based on a sow's behavioral needs. VFAFW also emphasizes the importance of agency in enhancing psychological welfare; facilities should provide sows with opportunities for choice through the ability to regulate social engagement and seek enrichment and physical comfort.

Published July 2024

The Veterinary Association for Farm Animal Welfare (VFAFW) is a non-profit organization and has filed for 501c(3) status. VFAFW advocates for animals used in food and fiber production by using a veterinary perspective grounded in animal welfare and ethics.

For more information, visit www.VFAFW.org or email info@VFAFW.org.