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More Space on Pig Farms

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The 1st January 2013 brings with it certain advances in favour of animal welfare. One of them is the full application of European regulations relating to livestock productions, specifically those dedicated to pig farming.[1]

The application of these regulations will be obligatory from the start of the year; this has provoked non-stop reactions from the specialised sector, mainly due to the reforms that pig farms ought to have implemented – based on the calendar that the regulations themselves fix for productions built in or reformed from 2003 onwards – given that the EU set the minimum requirements relating to the animal welfare of pigs in 2001.[2] Therefore, with 12 years having passed since the initial provisions, the regulations are mandatory in Spain from the 1st January this year.

The most critical sector of the producers has protested against the provisions contained in the regulations, regarding the costs needed to making the changes in the productions in this current economic climate in which we must overcome crisis. However, widespread awareness that has ended up prevailing is that which the EU has repeatedly indicated on the pre-eminence of animal welfare. In Europe, once the quotas have been met, what matters and is prevalent is animal welfare, as one of the elements of a globalised market and as one of the means of ensuring public health.

The aspect that will be most affected is the space meant for different types of animals -[3] of pigs – meant for rearing and fattening, , and so, according to a table of measurements annexed to the text of the Royal Decree, the minimum floor space allowance is determined to be 2.25m² for pigs and 1.64m² for piglets.

The regulations are trying to put an end to the overcrowding of certain intensive rearing productions, but they also apply to extensive rearing productions, for which a penalty system has also been developed. The question is whether, after a long decade after the creation of regulations for the EU, these criteria continue to prevail, or whether, in our case, they should be wholly updated and revised before proceeding to application with no turning back.

If one would want to consider an example of the effects of the application of a European regulation on production animals, which for Spain entailed wide discussion and received criticism from all social sectors, one needs to think back no further than to the regulations relating to laying and fattening hens, that is, the elimination of battery cages for hens.[4] After a year, it can be said that the implementation of the regulations has been a success and has reached even those most resistant to change, as always happens in the consumer market. These days there are no supermarkets in which you can't find free range eggs clearly distinguished from those with an indeterminate rearing, but whose compulsory numerical classification informs the consumer that there is no guarantee that the hens that produced eggs they are going to buy were reared in a minimal welfare system.

From these dates, it is easy to imagine that, within a year, a similar phenomenon will occur and that we will start to ask before buying which type of rearing has the animal whose meat we are about to consume experienced. For this, labelling that specifies the method of production is still necessary, which would entail a change that is already being advocated by the governing bodies of the EU. The future looks bright for all of us who think that better training and information on the laws that apply to animals will lead to a greater respect for their interests, which are none other than those which animal welfare is trying to ensure.

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[1] [Royal Decree 1392/2012](#), of 5th October, modifying Royal Decree 1135/2002, of 31st October, on the minimum standards for the protection of pigs at farms (BOE nº 241, de 6/10/2012)

[2] Royal Decree 1135/2002 is the result of the incorporation of Directive 2001/88/EC, of 23rd October 2001, modifying Directive 91/630/EEC, laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs, into the Spanish legal framework. The final versions of both Directives are brought together in [Council Directive 120/2008 of 18th December](#).

[3] The Royal Decree distinguishes between: pigs: “female animal of the porcine species after the first part”; young pig: “female animal of the porcine species after puberty and before the part”: a female of the porcine species is a lactating pig until 10 weeks of age;; production pig: “a pig up until ten weeks of age, until slaughter or breeding;; boar: “male animal of the porcine species after puberty used for reproduction”.

[4] Cfr. Giménez-Candela, T., [Cuestión de huevos](#); WISE, S., [An argument for the Basic Legal Rights of Farmed Animals](#); In 2012, EU countries must [eliminate battery hen productions](#)