

72 Suckling Piglets

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[The news](#) that appeared in the media only a few weeks ago did not receive enough attention; it was of 72 suckling piglets in a pork production centre in Huercal-Overa (Almeria) being crushed to death by two workers aged 19 and 22.

The events were filmed and shared by the authors; a scene in which one of them launched himself on a group of suckling piglets enclosed in a passageway, precisely at the time of weaning when being moved to breeding areas. The images, which I will not share here, are cruel and heartless; a man repeatedly jumping on the tiny, pink piglets that emit piercing screams of panic and cannot escape to safety, squeezed against one another in a passageway, the entrance and exit of which had been closed earlier by employees. The man, who let out cries of laughter, threw himself on the piglets. From the depths one hears the echo of the laughs and cries of he who filmed the scene, while the body of the author crushes the piglets that, little by little, become still, sprawled out, shattered. And the film ends there. The result was as follows: 19 pigs crushed and 53 with lethal injuries, so bad that they died a little later. In total, 72 piglets, around 28 days old, killed in a horrific manner. Unbelievable.

Destined to be roasted and served at a table, a suckling piglet is the newborn offspring of a pig, breastfed by its mother – from which comes the name - between the first two to four weeks of its life. At the end of this period the weaning process is undergone at intensive breeding farms. The suckling piglets, born in litters of 10, are separated from their mother and from the warmth of their siblings and are led, upon their first appearance in an unknown world, to the rooms in which they will be fattened and bred as piglets until they reach 22/23kg. From this point onwards they are considered pigs and, once reaching sufficient weight (113.4kg), end up in a slaughterhouse, if they have not already been slaughtered and served whole as the speciality dish of certain places in Spain (Segovian piglet, *porcella* of Mallorca, etc.).

At the time of weaning the suckling piglets are especially vulnerable to the stress factors of “separation from the mother, change in diet and living environment and mixing with unknown animals”, as affirmed by expert in Animal Welfare Professor Xavier Manteca,[1] meaning that objectively the suckling piglets that were crushed were, in all likelihood, in a state of confusion, utterly defenceless. However, the judge that heard the case, before whom the owner of the establishment presented the claim of animal abuse and damages along with terrible images shared on Whatsapp, made the choice to let the two employees go free with neither a charge nor a cautionary measure. We would hope that the cause initiated by the claim would continue forward and that the deed would not go unpunished.

Aside from what is stated in Articles 336 and 337 of the Criminal Code on animal abuse,[2] state legislation on production animals is more than abundant, and very detailed

and precise.[3] In Spain, pig producers in particular[4] have made a big effort in recent years to adapt to the European Union Directives on animal welfare,[5] and breeding facilities have more than satisfactorily achieved the fundamentals of animal welfare. However, it is clear that one of the recommendations of the aforementioned legislation, relating to the training of employees in production farms, is yet to be implemented in a definite manner. This was highlighted by a Master thesis entitled “La formación como instrumento de mejora del Bienestar Animal”[6] (Training as a tool for improving Animal Welfare), read in December 2015 for the Animal Law and Society Master at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

Training is always key for improvements in dealing with animals. The better and more professional the training of farms workers is, the better the welfare of the animals will be and the more rewarded the workers that handle the animals in these establishments will feel. The content of the regulatory framework must be made in a clear, simple and accessible manner, if we are to truly hope that such events do not occur in the future. It is not enough to legislate against mistreatment; one must professionally transform the treatment toward animals so that it becomes “good treatment”. In our surrounding countries, training courses for farm employees are compulsory and designed to stimulate responsibility in those that work in close contact with sentient beings.

Some may relate the suckling piglets to a 1995 film that had instant success, “Babe, a Little pig goes a long way”, which tells the story of an abandoned pig, reared in a farm by a sheepdog that wants to be, and ultimately becomes, a sheepdog. The film, nominated for 7 Oscars, is the adaptation of the children’s book by Dick King-Smith, by George Miller, the producer of “Mad Max”. Babe received the Oscar for the best special effects, for the credibility with which the animals spoke. It makes one think of the determination of a sucking piglet that struggles to adapt itself to a new situation and to survive and to succeed. The experience of living! Many who saw the film decided, then, to become vegetarians.

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[1] MANTECA, X., [Bienestar Animal, ch. VIII.](#)

[2] [CP. Art. 336 and 337](#)

[3] Ministry of Agriculture, Food and the Environment

[4] ANDROGAPOR, Asociación Nacional de Productores de ganado Porcino.

[5] Directive 2008/120/EC of the Council of 18 December laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs establishes a series of minimum conditions for use since 1 January 2003 and others that must be met by all pork productions from 1 January 2013. Adapted by Royal Decree 1135/2002, which has been modified by the Royal Decree 1392/2012 of 5th October.

[6] BOADA, M., La formació com a eina de millora del Benestar Animal. Anàlisi de la formació del personal de les explotacions porcínes catalanes". Overseen by Prof. Dr. X. Manteca (UAB).