

© 2017 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2017, 26: 449-459
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.26.4.449

Determination of swine euthanasia criteria and analysis of barriers to euthanasia in the United States using expert opinion

CR Mullins[†], MD Pairis-Garcia^{*†}, KA George[†], R Anthony[‡], AK Johnson[§], GJ Coleman[#],
J-L Rault[#] and ST Millman[¶]

[†] Department of Animal Sciences, The Ohio State University, 2029 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210, USA

[‡] Department of Philosophy, University of Alaska Anchorage, 3211 Providence Drive, Anchorage, AK 99508, USA

[§] Department of Animal Science, Iowa State University, 2356F Kildee Hall, Ames, IA 50011, USA

[#] Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, Animal Welfare Science Centre, The University of Melbourne, Alice Hoy Building 162, Parkville, VIC 3010, Australia

[¶] Veterinary Diagnostic and Production Animal Medicine, Iowa State University, 2201 Lloyd Veterinary Medical Center, Ames, IA 50011, USA

* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: pairis-garcia.l@osu.edu

Abstract

*Timely euthanasia on swine farms can help to reduce the incidence of poor welfare outcomes for compromised pigs (*Sus scrofa*) when recovery is prolonged or impossible. Timely euthanasia relies upon caretakers' abilities to identify compromised pigs and administer euthanasia in various environments. To determine appropriate timelines and most common reasons for on-farm euthanasia, an online survey was conducted with members of the United States National Pork Board. Additionally, two focus groups were conducted to investigate barriers and possible solutions associated with timely euthanasia. Clinical signs related to poor locomotion (57.6%), prolapses (47.2%), and hernias (43.5%) were identified by the greatest percentage of respondents who believed immediate euthanasia was warranted, while a greater percentage of respondents believed euthanasia was not warranted for clinical signs related to the integumentary (90.3%), reproductive (75.8%), and respiratory (67.5%) systems. The most common reason for euthanasia was poor body condition in pre-weaned piglets and non-ambulatory or severely weak for both breeding and non-breeding pigs. In the focus groups, two themes were identified when evaluating barriers to euthanasia on-farm, and participants agreed that making timely decisions relies upon several dimensions of risk analysis. An unsupportive farm culture was identified as a critical barrier to timely euthanasia decision-making, suggesting that caretaker characteristics may play a role in the success of any timely euthanasia programme. This present study has highlighted areas for future research and demonstrated the need to extend educational efforts both to swine industry leaders and producers to improve overall animal welfare by ensuring timely euthanasia in swine.*

Keywords: animal welfare, decision-making, education, euthanasia, swine, timeliness