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News Release

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MUTILATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT IN PIGLETS AND GROWING PIGS

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) today launched its Opinion on mutilations and environmental enrichment in piglets and growing pigs. The Opinion advises Government about the impact on young pigs' welfare of the various mutilations that they may be subject to during their lives. The procedures include tail docking, tooth clipping, identification and castration.

The Opinion assesses the need for mutilations in terms of the welfare costs and benefits and the extent to which management or husbandry practices, including environmental enrichment, might reduce the need for mutilations. Where mutilations are necessary, the Opinion addresses how procedures can be refined, including the possibility of providing pain relief.

Professor Wathes, Chairman of FAWC, said "Mutilations involve handling stress, acute pain and the possibility of chronic pain. Opportunities to improve welfare arise from either avoiding the need to carry out the mutilation or refining the procedure to reduce stress and pain. Most mutilations are carried out to prevent undesirable consequences of behaviours that may be manifested later. An ethical balance has to be struck between the harms associated with the mutilation and the risk and severity of subsequent events that the mutilation may alleviate."

He continued "Environmental enrichment plays a role in facilitating good welfare and is one of the management procedures that, by reducing injurious behaviour, might make the use of some mutilations less necessary."

Professor Wathes concluded that "The pig industry, Government and other stakeholders should be working together towards systems where pig behaviour is such that some or all mutilations become unnecessary. Where mutilations are still necessary then every effort should be made to refine procedures to minimise pain and distress, for example by provision of pain relief"

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Notes for Editors

1. The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is an independent advisory body established by Government in 1979 to keep under review the welfare of farm animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at the place of slaughter; and to advise Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, of any legislative or other changes that may be necessary.
2. Professor Christopher Wathes has been the Chairman of FAWC since January 2005. He is Professor of Animal Welfare at the Royal Veterinary College, University of London.
3. All FAWC members serve in a personal capacity and do not represent any organisation with which they may be associated.
4. Copies of FAWC publications are available from the FAWC Website or via the Secretariat at the address below. Approaches for interviews should also be routed through the Secretariat.
5. Following the Government's review of Arms Length Bodies (announced on 14 October) the Farm Animal Welfare Council will be reconstituted as an expert committee. Defra hopes to complete the change of status for all its arms length bodies, including FAWC, by 31 March 2011.

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