

Organic pig producers across Europe set the scene for research to improve animal welfare and reduce ammonia emission

The CORE Organic Cofund project POWER asks organic pig producers in eight European countries for innovative ideas to test; the aim is to improve animal welfare and reduce ammonia emissions from outdoor runs in organic housing systems for growing pigs.

Across Europe, organic pig producers rear growing-finishing pigs in indoor housing systems with access to outdoor runs. Increased space requirements combined with access to roughage and outdoor areas promote pig welfare. However, these housing systems, depending on the outdoor run construction, can be associated with poor pen hygiene, low possibilities for the pigs to carry out natural behaviour and risks of ammonia emissions.

Stakeholder-driven activities throughout Europe

The POWER project brings together organic pig producers and their advisors at national workshops in eight European countries and ask them for innovative ideas to improve the function of the outdoor runs through changes in management and pen design. One of the already conducted workshops revealed that farmers are quite aware of challenges regarding ammonia emissions and animal welfare with respect to their outdoor runs. Farmers mentioned various ideas how to improve the situation, such as “a well-functioning rooting area”, “avoid direct sunlight by orientating the outdoor run towards north” or “integrating a wallow to satisfy the pigs need for temperature control”. After the workshops, up to four innovations will be selected and experimentally evaluated in five European countries. Each selected innovation will be evaluated in at least two countries and at least two seasons. When the experimental evaluation has been carried out in 2020, the project brings together organic pig producers and advisors again. This time to assist in ‘translating’ the new scientific knowledge into practical guidelines.

About POWER

Through research on animal welfare, the farming environment and farm economics, and through best practices identified via the stakeholder network, POWER will contribute to resolving some of the most significant obstacles in current European organic pig farming with benefits for the whole pig sector. POWER includes experimental activities and best practice identification in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland.



The project will:

- Investigate the effects of farrowing pen design, sow genetics and management strategies on newborn piglet mortality and piglet health before and after weaning
- Investigate the effect of different designs of outdoor runs on growing-finishing pig behaviour, health as well as pen hygiene and ammonia emission
- Identify and field-test best practice examples of combined housing and pasture systems considering productivity, feed efficiency, animal health, and nutrient management
- Develop a framework for assessing system resilience in organic pig production
- Evaluate the overall effect of the identified innovative housing designs and management strategies on cost effectiveness, system resilience and ecological footprints
- Provide guidelines for organic pig producers across Europe.

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Visit the website of POWER: <http://projects.au.dk/coreorganiccofund/research-projects/power/>

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