

# VETERINARIAN STATEMENT ON SOW HOUSING

Food retailers have recently come under pressure from the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). HSUS/PETA want retailers to buy from producers that do not use individual maternity pens, also called gestation stalls. We as veterinarians write to you out of concern for animal welfare and good science.

While a few companies have acceded to the demands of HSUS/PETA, please be aware that current animal welfare science finds that individual sow housing provides several benefits not found in open pens. Individual maternity pens were developed several decades ago as a way to improve upon group-housing systems. In group situation housing, a social hierarchy develops in which sows establish an order. Within that order, sows fight for food and location, resulting in an imbalance of how much the animals eat. This hierarchy and aggression leads to injuries such as vulva biting, side biting, and lacerations. Dr. Roy Kirkwood from Michigan State University found that sows in group housing experience higher levels of cortisol, indicating that the animals are under more stress, likely due to the increase in fighting among animals that seek to dominate others.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) reviewed the scientific literature and finds that individual maternity housing provides for pregnant sows' needs. Specifically, individual pens protect sows from more aggressive animals and reduce competition for food. Moreover, individual maternity pens provide for heightened individual animal care as compared to group-housing systems. A 2005 AVMA review concluded that "overall, gestation stalls do not induce a greater physiologic stress response in sows than do group housing systems" and that the "rate of sow injury is reduced in gestation stall housing, compared with group housing." Additionally, the American Association of Swine Veterinarians has found that the use of individual maternity housing meets critical criteria for sow care.

Going forward, we hope that you will make sure your company policies are based on recommendations from animal experts, not animal rights activists.

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