



GESTATION CRATES: Problems & Solutions

Pigs are extremely smart, social animals capable of feeling fear, pain and stress. Studies show that they are more intelligent than dogs and even some primates, and scientists have demonstrated that pigs are capable of playing simple video games, learning from each other, and even learning names.

MANY OF TODAY'S INDUSTRIAL PIG FARMS deny animals the ability to engage in important natural behaviors. Most mother pigs are confined in "[gestation crates](#)" for virtually their entire lives. These crates are about the same width and length of a pig's body, preventing the animals from even turning around. This is one of the cruelest practices in all of agribusiness.



THE SCIENCE IS CLEAR

Renowned animal welfare scientist Dr. Temple Grandin says, "We've got to treat animals right, and gestation stalls have got to go." [The Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production](#)—which was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, and included the former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture—recommended that "all systems that restrict natural movement," including gestation crates, be phased-out.

THE ECONOMICS STACK UP

The alternative is "group housing," which affords animals greater freedom of movement. Iowa State University conducted a [two-and-a-half year long economic analysis](#) of the issue and found that that "group housing...resulted in a weaned pig cost that was 11 percent less than the cost of a weaned pig from the individual stall confinement system."

LEGISLATION AND FOOD RETAILERS FAVOR GROUP HOUSING

Nine U.S. states and the E.U. have passed laws to prohibit the use of gestation crates, and some of the world's largest food companies—like [Costco](#), [McDonald's](#), [Burger King](#), [Wendy's](#), [Oscar Mayer/Kraft](#), [Kroger](#), [Safeway](#), [Denny's](#), [Cracker Barrel](#), [Sonic](#), [CKE Restaurants](#) (Carl's Jr. and Hardee's), [Baja Fresh](#), [Kmart](#), [Heinz](#), [Sodexo](#) and [Compass Group](#) (the top foodservice company in the world)—have announced that they will eliminate gestation crates from their supply chains. Other companies—like [Harris Teeter](#), [Winn-Dixie](#), [Carl's Jr.](#), [Hardee's](#), and [Quiznos](#), and [Red Robin Gourmet Burgers](#)—have adopted policies to move away from pork from pigs confined in gestation crates. [Chipotle](#), [Whole Foods](#), [Wolfgang](#)



"McDonald's believes gestation stalls are not a sustainable production system for the future...[and] wants to see the end of sow confinement in gestation stalls in our supply chain."



"Wendy's is working with its U.S. and Canadian Pork Suppliers to eliminate the use of sow gestation stalls over time. We believe that confining pigs in gestation stalls is not sustainable over the long-term, and moving away from this practice is the right thing to do."



"[Burger King] pledges to eliminate gestation crates for breeding pigs...[and will] only purchase pork from suppliers that can demonstrate documented plans to end their use of gestation crates."

Puck and others only use gestation crate-free pork.

THE PORK INDUSTRY IS SHIFTING

Major pork producers have also begun moving away from this practice. [Smithfield Foods](#) (the world's largest pork producer) and [Hormel Foods](#) (maker of SPAM, and also a leading pork producer) have announced that their company-owned facilities will be gestation crate-free by 2017 and pork producer [Cargill](#) is already 50 percent gestation crate-free at its operations. Other pork companies, like Tyson Foods and Seaboard Corporation, refuse to act on this important social issue by committing to switch to group housing.

PUBLIC OPINION

An [American Farm Bureau](#) poll found that 95 percent of Americans believe farm animals should be well-cared for, and [Citigroup](#) reported that cruelty to animals presents a "headline risk" to restaurant companies. A study by the food industry consulting firm [Technomic](#) found that animal welfare is the [third most-important social issue](#) to restaurant patrons, outranking the environment. And a [Michigan State University](#) study found that 60 percent or more of respondents in every state would support outlawing gestation crates.

MAINSTREAM MEDIA COVERAGE HAS HELPED DRIVE THE ISSUE



'EARTHQUAKE' IN THE PIG BUSINESS: MCDONALD'S TO END USE OF RESTRAINING CRATES

By [Miranda Leitsinger, msnbc.com](#)

McDonald's says it will require its U.S. pork suppliers to detail their plans to phase out using sow gestation stalls -- in which pigs cannot turn around -- following similar moves by a number of countries, states and other companies to end a practice that activists say is inhumane and can lead to health problems in the animals.

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More than 5.8 million pigs are used for breeding in the U.S. pork industry, with an estimated 60 to 70 percent confined to gestation crates, or sow stalls, during their 112- to 115-day pregnancies. The metal crates are only a little bigger than the sow and are typically placed side-by-side in rows -- often with more than 20 sows to a row, according to a 2011 report by The Humane Society of the United States.

The New York Times

"Industrial confinement is cruel and senseless and will turn out to be, we hope, a relatively short-lived anomaly in modern farming."

— 2010 NYT editorial on laws banning the extreme confinement of farm animals

For more information, please visit http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/confinement_farm/.