Baseline study of infringement level of welfare regulations in Danish pig herds

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In order to secure the animal welfare in production animals, the Danish Food and Veterinary Administration (DVFA) decided to establish the proportion of pig herds in which welfare regulations were violated in 2011. This species has been subject to campaigns to improve compliance with welfare regulations in recent years (e.g. culling at farms). The objective of this study was to establish the proportion of Danish pig herds not complying with animal welfare regulations. To assess this, a random sample of 300 pig herds with at least 10 pigs was visited by veterinary officers from DVFA from August through December 2011. Veterinary officers were used for visits because herd owners cannot deny them access. A list of 380 regulation points was evaluated and for each point the herd could receive four marks: (1) no marks; (2) warning; (3) enforcement notice; or (4) police reporting. In total 150 herds received one of the four marks. Of the 300 herds, 127 (42%) herds receiving a warning, 42 (14%) an enforcement notice and 16 (5%) a police reporting. The most commonly noticed infringement of regulation was access to rooting material; pigs did not have access to rooting material in 72 (24%) herds. Providing soft bedding in sick pens for injured and diseased animals and isolation and treatment of injured and diseased animals received marks in 58 (19%) and 56 (19%) herds, respectively. Results from this study can be compared with future studies to evaluate if infringements of welfare regulations changes over time. It needs to be kept in mind that a control of compliance with welfare legislation cannot replace a full welfare assessment, but it is still an important indicator of the minimum standards.