



## Sustainability of Pig Production: Stakeholders' Views

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Is meat production under threat? It's increasingly criticised as "unsustainable" on several fronts and more people are turning to vegetarian and vegan diets. Hence, scientists and the industry recognise the need to ensure livestock production systems meet consumer expectations on animal welfare and the environment. But what does sustainability actually mean and how best is it measured? One of the major challenges regarding livestock production sustainability is the lack of an accepted definition that integrates all the different dimensions of its so-called 'pillars': environment, economic, animal welfare and social aspects.

SusPigSys is a European initiative that aims to address this challenge, looking at how profitability can be sustained, while maintaining animal health and welfare and promoting farmer wellbeing - all without compromising environmental resources. Working with the industry it assesses the range of pig production systems in seven EU member states (Austria, Germany, Finland, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). Specifically, it aims to support the development of sustainable approaches by improving pig production across Europe for the benefit of farmers, animals, the environment and wider society.

The success of our project is strongly linked to the continuous engagement of researchers with a variety of stakeholders for the duration of the project. Hence, in addition to farm visits for data collection, researchers have also carried out national workshops with stakeholders to discuss what they consider to be their top sustainability priorities in relation to the four pillars and identify the most suitable pig production systems that characterise each country. Overall, 80 participants (e.g., farmers, vets, processors, retailers, consumers, NGO representatives and policy makers) joined our national workshops. Participants in the UK were unanimous in asking us to avoid the term 'intensive-production'. They felt this has particularly negative connotations for the public and tends to be associated with poor welfare. Of course, they are right in saying intensive production doesn't automatically equate with poor animal welfare, any more than extensive systems necessarily have high welfare.

We also discussed the important social implications for farmers themselves and the stress that can arise for farming families when production is economically unsustainable. Participants in Italy pointed out that pig meat consumption has gradually declined and the number of vegetarians and vegans has increased in recent years, due mainly to concerns related to animal welfare and environmental impacts. Other participants (e.g., from Germany, Finland, the UK) stressed the importance of consumers' power along the supply chain and societal acceptance/public image of pig production and the farming profession, highlighting the disconnect between the industry and the consumer.

The national workshops and our farm visits both reveal that most EU pig farmers relate to animal welfare and environmental impact as well as the economic survival of their businesses,

juggling a whole range of demands. Farmers also would like people outside the industry to better understand the demanding work of pig farmers in producing food sustainably. Some participants felt that the media, particularly television, fails to get their message across fairly, although progressive farmers, and younger entrants in particular, increasingly exploit social media, communicating directly to consumers.

So, what's next for SusPigSys? We will be using data from our farm visits to develop an integrated analysis toolbox. This will summarise data from the farms across the four pillars of sustainability and link to an existing international pig production database. From all this information we will be able to develop benchmarking and computer software to help farmers to assess the sustainability of their own businesses. This in turn will support the development of sustainable methods across the different EU pig production systems.

Website for more information: <https://suspigsys.fli.de/en/home>

