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Routine hormonal Treatment of breeding Sows - Impact on Pig Welfare

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Introduction

Hormonal treatment of sows to manipulate their natural sexual cycle and hence increase their breeding performance is common in intensive pig farming worldwide. The goal is to influence a sow's oestrus and birth processes to wean as many piglets as possible in the shortest achievable time as well as to synchronize and minimize workflow.[1,2] The hormones used are approved as veterinary medicine, but are mainly administered to enhance the reproduction performance of sows not to cure or prevent diseases. The drugs have undesirable and sometimes life-threatening side effects. The application methods cause pain and stress for the individual and the hormonal intervention in the fertility cycle of a sow can have serious health impairments for her and her piglets. Pharmaceutical industry and legislator worldwide approve and market hormones on a grand scale and allow the routine use in sows without medical necessity but to increase profit.
In European organic pig farming, this practice is prohibited by law.[3]

The welfare-related consequences for sows and piglets that result from the routine use of hormones are presented below. The aim is to shed light on the suffering of animals in modern pig farming and to work towards a legal ban on the use of hormones and other veterinary drugs without medical indications.

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Aims of hormonal Treatments and their Relevance to Animal Welfare

Synchronization of Oestrus

In recent decades, the industrialization of pig farming has led to a greater specialization of the individual farming sections and, as a result, increasingly complex working methods on the farm. In addition, the food industry requires a high level of planning for its processes and always requires predefined quantities of meat and animal products in order to be able to operate profitably.
Therefore, pigs are fattened in homogeneous groups of the same age so that they can be slaughtered in the same groups. This is one reason for the so-called “oestrus synchronization” of sows: in order to fatten homogeneous numbers of pigs, a predefined number of piglets must be born at the same time. To achieve this, sows are housed in groups and their reproductive cycle is synchronized. This means they simultaneously come into oestrus, can be inseminated and become pregnant at the same time and give birth to their piglets at the same time.
This management allows farms to facilitate their work, so that complex activities, such as insemination, birth control and piglet care, can be scheduled for defined days and times. A sow's sexual cycle can be easily manipulated by repeated intramuscular or subcutaneous injections and oral application of the hormones.

Increase in Productivity due to hormonal Influences and its Consequences for Health

The pig industry requires breeding performances from a sow of about 2.3 pregnancies per year with 30 weaned piglets.[4,5] This is only realized by administering hormones and thereby reducing a sow’s non-productive days between weaning and next oestrus to a minimum of few days to obtain more pregnancies and piglets per year.[6,7,8,9] This manipulation of a sow's sexual cycle can have serious health consequences for her and her piglets, which are described more detailed below.

Manipulation of Oestrus and Induction of a juvenile Sow’s Puberty

As a principle, sows shall come into heat immediately after weaning their piglets to rise the economic profit of a breeder. Nevertheless, after a strenuous lactation period due to the breeding-related high number of piglets (the German average is 17.7 per litter)[10], the inadequate housing and hygiene conditions (crate) and the associated stress, sows do physiologically not come into heat in such a short time. But to avoid loss of productivity of the farm, sows can be forced into the next cycle within a few hours under the artificial influence of hormones.[11] The same applies to the seasonal infertility of sows, which frequently occurs in (late) summer[12,13] and can effectively be suspended with hormones.[14,15] The consequence of this is a significant seasonal increase of abortions (autumn abortion syndrome).[16]

In addition, the first heat of a juvenile sow can be triggered with hormones,[7] "since … a certain number of oestrus before the first insemination is essential for high first farrowing rates" (Brüssow und Wähner 2005, p. 159).[17] Formerly, sows reached sexual maturity at the age of about six months.[18] However, the pig breeding system of recent decades focused on a higher lean meat content in pig meat. This led to a later onset of sexual maturity (>200 days) in modern sow breeds due to a later development of the necessary quantity of body fat tissue.[19] Age of puberty can

therefore differ individually depending on genetics and can be “delayed” from an economic point of view. The sexually unproductive period of a juvenile sow can then be reduced by artificially inducing puberty with hormones in order to advance the age of first insemination. This so-called oestrus induction of prepubertal gilts also serves the purpose of keeping cycle-identical sows in a group right from the start and integrating them to the cycle level of the older sows of a farm (see section on oestrus synchronization above). The first heat, and therefore breeding maturity, of a sow can be trigged prematurely using hormonal agents.[20,21] This intervention only serves economic interests.

In general, sows get first inseminated at a very young age between 200 and 260 days, [22] with a minimum weight of around 135-165kg.[23] At this time a sow is neither fully grown nor physiologically prepared for the impending, unrelenting physical emaciation in her short life, because: Bone growth of domestic pigs is only completed at an age of around 18 months.[24] They are considered to be fully grown after three to four years, [25] and physically and mentally adult at the age of five. [26] If a sow is inseminated during her early developmental phase, the body uses most of its energy for the pregnancy instead of processes such as bone formation, organ development, and the maturation of the immune system. This leads to a severe energy deficiency, which harms the body. It is thus accepted that sows will undergo multiple pregnancies throughout their entire growth phase, as well as give birth to, care for, and raise a total of around one hundred piglets. This is done without regard for the serious health consequences, which include diseases of the uterus, oviducts and ovaries, significantly impairing fertility. 30 to 40 percent of sows in Germany,[27,28] and up to 66 percent worldwide[29] are slaughtered at a very young age due to fertility disorders. 20 percent of them had only a single litter.[29] Fertility disorders are the most common reason for the premature culling of sows.[30] In 60 to 70 percent of cases, these disorders are non-infectious,[31,30] but rather caused by management practices.[27]
Furthermore, the mortality rate of breeding sows in Germany has been around seven percent for years.[4] In 2023, this amounted to approximately 100,000 sows that succumbed to their illnesses before being slaughtered (so-called fallen stock).[32]

Risks of shortened Lactation Periods and delayed uterine Involution

Under natural conditions, a sow weans her piglets at the age of 13 to 17 weeks.[33] Conventional farms typically wean their piglets after a very short lactation period of 3 weeks.[34,35] Immediately afterward, sows are hormonally induced to come into heat and are inseminated right away. After such a short period, the uterine involution and healing processes necessary for a subsequent pregnancy are highly likely to be incomplete.[36] The uterine involution is, for example, given much medical importance in humans, as this 'postpartum period' can generally be accompanied by significant complications in mammals.[37] The involution processes begin immediately after birth and end when the uterus has regained its pre-pregnancy size and structure. In this process, the endogenous hormone oxytocin, which is released during suckling of the piglets, plays a crucial role.[38] In this way, the suckling process promotes uterine involution, and excessively short lactation periods therefore carry the risk of delayed involution and healing of the sow's uterus. However, an uninterrupted course of these processes after pregnancy is essential for the health of the female reproductive organs, as any deviations are associated with increased susceptibility to infections and complications for future

fertility.[39] Studies by Meile et al. (2020), [40] Grahofer et al. (2022), [41] and Thilmant et al. (2022) [42] were able to detect a uterine involution process in sows even on the 28th day after birth. With the usual rhythm of a very short lactation period of 21 days, sows are typically inseminated again on the 26th day after farrowing using hormones. This is a time when the sow's uterine involution is still not fully completed.

Furthermore, dystocia (prolonged births) and stillbirths – both consequences of unnaturally high piglet numbers per litter due to breeding and management practices[43] – can significantly delay the uterine involution processes.[44] This significantly limits the predictability of uterine involution and is not taken into account in the routine insemination intervals. On average, 1-2 piglets per litter are stillborn.[45,46] Therefore, a significantly delayed uterine involution can be expected in almost all sows. If the uterine regeneration processes are not yet complete and the sow becomes pregnant through hormonal intervention after insemination, this can lead to significant health consequences, also for her unborn piglets.[47] This includes, for example, inadequate placenta development with reduced blood flow and consequently insufficient supply to the fetuses,[48] which can lead to abortions. That abortions are considered a normal occurrence to some extent on a breeding farm[49] is highlighted by the legal regulation of the German Swine Husbandry Hygiene Ordinance (SchHaltHygV). This states that an abortion rate of up to 2.5 percent is tolerated without the farmer being required to conduct an investigation to determine the cause.[50] According to studies, sow farms have an annual abortion rate of two to three percent.[51] 60 to 70 percent of all abortions are not due to disease-related causes but are rather attributable to management-related factors.[16] For each pregnancy, there is more than a one percent risk for a sow to experience an abortion.[51] In numerical terms, sows in Germany suffer from miscarriages in approximately 65,000 cases[52] each year, which are attributed to faulty and health-damaging breeding management and, in themselves, are already associated with health impairments.

Diseases of the reproductive Organs

One of the most severe and significant diseases in sows is the MMA complex (Mastitis = inflammation of the udder, Metritis = inflammation of the uterus, Agalactia = lack of milk production), also known as the postpartum septicemia complex. With an average incidence of 10 to 30 percent, it represents one of the biggest health problems in the global sow population.[53] It is a multifactorial occurrence with up to 30 possible causes, including bacterial infections, poor housing conditions, and inadequate feeding.[54] The symptoms can be life-threatening for sows and their piglets. It is important to emphasize that overstrain of the female reproductive organs and an insufficient immune status of the sow form the basis for the onset and severity of the disease. It is notable that first-time breeding gilts, who are forced into pregnancy too early due to their immature immunological protection, are 6 to 10 percent more likely to fall ill than older sows.[55]

Sows that endure this exhausting and health-threatening hormonal manipulation without any external symptoms are still typically slaughtered after five to six litters, and consequently at the age of three to four years,[56,57] as their reproductive performance declines despite hormonal treatments. Their productive lifespan and natural life expectancy (which ranges from eight to ten years[58]) differ significantly,

highlighting an animal welfare-violating system of structural exploitation of a female animal. This is confirmed by studies on the reproductive organs of slaughtered sows, which show a significant rate of pathological changes, indicating the suffering the sows experienced during their lifetime: De Jong et al. (2014)[59] found that 52 percent of macroscopically normal uteri showed mild to severe inflammation histopathologically, with chronic endometritis being the most common finding. In pig farming, the animals consequently suffer structurally from sometimes very painful diseases of the reproductive organs, which would actually severely impair fertility. However, this can be circumvented through hormone use, to the detriment of the sows and piglets.

High Piglet Mortality

The birth of an unnaturally high number of piglets, which can be promoted by hormonal manipulation, leads to animal welfare issues - both for the sows and the piglets. Prolonged labor, sometimes lasting for hours, significantly increases the risk of birthing complications, with a high proportion of stillborn piglets.[48] Litters with very small, underweight, and even weak piglets are primarily the result of selective breeding for large litters and the hormonal manipulation of a sow's reproduction.[27] The mortality rate of piglets attributable to this is, on average, around 10 to 20 percent of all live-born piglets worldwide.[60] Seven to twelve percent of piglets are stillborn,[61] 75 percent of them die during the birthing process.[16] In 2018, Germany had a piglet mortality and stillbirth rate of 22.9 percent.[62] A scientifically proven correlation exists between increasing litter size and this phenomenon.[43,48,63]

According to an estimate by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture for 2019, around 6.7 million suckling piglets die annually in Germany due to this profit-driven system.[64]

Induction and Acceleration of Labor

In pig farming, the simultaneous farrowing of animals within a group is of great importance from an industrial perspective. The goal is to achieve synchronized farrowing periods within the sow groups, as well as a short birthing duration for each individual animal.[65] The gestation period for sows is typically 114 days.[66] However, the gestation process is individual for each sow and can vary by a few days. Additionally, factors such as litter size[67] and genetics[68] can extend the gestation period. If sows show no signs of impending birth while other animals in the group are already in labor - or if the sows in a group have exceeded their scheduled due date - births are hormonally induced to save labor time in monitoring all sows (especially at night).[69] For this purpose, hormones such as Oxytocin, Carbetocin, or Prostaglandin F2alpha are injected to trigger contractions and thus the birth, as well as to shorten the process. However, shortening a normally progressing pregnancy has been scientifically proven to increase the stillbirth rate, particularly in large litters.[70] Each additional day of pregnancy increases the survival chances of weaker piglets in a litter, which is not taken into account with scheduled induction of birth. This significantly exacerbates the issue of piglet mortality.

Administered Hormones

The hormones listed below are the most commonly used active substances in Germany. They are provided in advance to farmers by herd veterinarians and applied by the farm staff without further veterinary supervision. The industry refers to this as "biotechnical measures for estrus synchronization and reproductive control".

eCG (equine chorionic Gonadotropin)

Equine CG, also known as PMSG (pregnant mare serum gonadotropin), is produced in the uterus of pregnant mares and directly extracted from their blood. The rough handling of the mares during blood collection and the systematic animal cruelty at the so-called "blood farms" in South America and Iceland have been extensively documented and published in recent years.[71] Until 2022, even at a German stud mares were regularly subjected to this stressful and high-risk blood collection to obtain eCG.

The hormone belongs to the chorionic gonadotropins, which regulate the female sexual cycle in many ways by stimulating follicle growth on the ovaries.[72] It is injected intramuscularly or subcutaneously. In pig breeding, there are several indications: in addition to its follicle-stimulating effect in adult animals, it is the only natural hormone capable of inducing puberty, a sow's first oestrus. Moreover, eCG is used to treat the so-called "gilt anestrus". This is not a disease but refers to gilts that have not shown any signs of oestrus by the age of 220 days.[73] To mask the reasons for this anestrus, such as an animal welfare-infringing environment with insufficient boar contact, and to avoid economic losses, eCG is administered to induce oestrus. This is because 7[74] to 17.2[75] percent of gilts are prematurely sent to slaughter for economic reasons due to their failure to cycle.

Young and adult sows can be brought into a synchronized cycle and inseminated on schedule using eCG. It can be used either alone or in combination with synthetic hormones. Moreover, chorionic gonadotropins are the only hormones capable of inducing superovulation. This results in a larger number of developed fetuses and, consequently, an increase in litter size. However, high embryonic losses, as well as underweight and weak piglets, can be a consequence of this effect.

The list of contraindications and side effects of eCG is long.[76] Since it is a foreign protein, there is always a risk of allergic or even anaphylactic reactions. Reports of adverse drug reactions (ADRs) from 2010 to 2020 describe anaphylactic shocks with symptoms such as circulatory disturbances, shortness of breath, and edema in sows approximately 15 minutes after injection.[77]

Due to its long duration of action, eCG occasionally stimulates additional follicles after ovulation, which produce estrogens and can have a negative impact on embryo development. In general, it should not be used in pregnant sows or those with ovarian cysts. Treatment during oestrus or in the first half of the cycle can promote the development of ovarian cysts, as can puberty induction in gilts that have already started cycles without showing oestrus signs.

A non cycle-appropriate administration may not be recognized by the breeder, which increases the risk of health complications for the sow. Anestrus (lack of cycle) due to the aforementioned follicular cysts can be a result of this.

Analogs of gonadotropin-releasing Hormone (GnRH) include Peforelin, Buserelin, and Gonadorelin

These are synthetic analogs of gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH). Their effect after a single intramuscular or subcutaneous injection is comparable to that of eCG. Through a similar mechanism, the growth and ovulation of follicles in the ovaries are stimulated, thereby inducing the cycle in a sow. However, the use of these hormones in sows and sexually mature gilts can also lead to the formation of follicular cysts, which negatively impacts fertility and health. The active substances should not be used in animals during pregnancy and lactation. A teratogenic effect (causing malformations) cannot be ruled out.[76]

Studies in humans have shown that Buserelin is eliminated in its intact form in urine to 50%.[78] Thus, hormonal contamination of the excretions of treated sows can be expected. Since their manure is later used as agricultural soil fertilizer, some level of environmental pollution must be anticipated.

Triptorelin

Triptorelin is also a synthetic analog of GnRH. It is available in the form of a gel, which is administered intravaginally to the sow via an infusion tube. The gel should not be used in sows with abnormalities in the reproductive tract, infertile sows, or those with general health issues.[76] Abnormalities in the reproductive tract and health disorders are generally not detectable through superficial examinations of the animal, so there is a risk of treating a sick sow.

All the hormones mentioned are on the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) prohibition list. Their use is forbidden for male athletes at all times, both before and during competitions.[79] Furthermore, Gonadorelin is classified as a prohibited doping substance in equestrian sports under Annex I of the ADMR (Anti-Doping and Medication Control Rules for Equestrian Sports). The diverse performance-enhancing potential of these hormones is clearly evident in this context.

Altrenogest

This is a synthetic steroid hormone from the progestogen group, which is administered orally over several consecutive days via feed. Progestogens are synthetic analogs of progestins. In humans, they are used in hormonal contraception due to their cycle-blocking effect. In pig breeding, the hormone is used for the purpose of cycle blockage in gilts to successfully integrate them into the existing breeding program. The goal is to prevent oestrus and ovulation in all gilts in the group. Already developing follicles are regressed by Altrenogest, and the sow's natural cycle is blocked in this unnatural way. After the treatment ends, follicle growth and maturation occur immediately, so all sows of a group can then be synchronized in ovulation using the aforementioned hormones or without further hormonal treatment. Improper administration of Altrenogest can cause the development of ovarian cysts, which is the most common change in the ovaries of pigs.[27]
Altrenogest should not be used in pregnant or lactating sows, nor in animals with uterine infections. However, there are treatment recommendations for pregnant sows at the end of pregnancy to delay the birth process, with the goal of having all sows in a group farrow at the same time.[80] The contraindications of veterinary medicines are clearly being ignored here for economic purposes.

The correct dosage on each treatment day is extremely important, as underdosing carries a high risk of follicular cyst formation. A reliable intake of the correct hormone amount through feed requires very precise management. In many cases, the feeding of Altrenogest occurs during the individual fixation of the sow in the farrowing crate, which is condemned and rejected from an animal welfare perspective.

In 2013, Germany raised concerns about a potentially serious environmental risk posed by veterinary medicines containing Altrenogest, as the active substance, due to its steroidal molecular structure, could be highly toxic to aquatic organisms. Germany subsequently initiated a procedure with the EU Commission under Article 35 of Directive 2001/82/EC, which was reviewed by the Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP).[81] In 2016, the Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP) concluded that Altrenogest presents a potential risk to fish and aquatic organisms under certain ecological conditions. To minimize the risk, the product license holders eventually proposed the following recommendation: "When spreading manure from treated animals, the minimum distance to waters defined by national or local regulations must be strictly observed, as the manure may contain Altrenogest, which could have harmful effects on the aquatic environment." Despite this potential toxicity, the CVMP was of the opinion that "Altrenogest-containing veterinary medicines are indispensable in modern pig production, as gilt oestrus synchronization is a tool that allows farrowing in strict batches; this, in turn, has obvious advantages for farm management and hygiene, and thus for animal health." At that time, the overall benefit-risk ratio for Altrenogest was assessed as favorable to the industry.[82]

For economic purposes, a steroid hormone may ultimately be systematically used in millions of sows, even though, according to REGULATION (EC) No. 1272/2008, it must not enter water bodies, as it is chronically hazardous to water and highly toxic to fish and other aquatic organisms with long-term effects - thus posing a significant environmental risk.
Additionally, Altrenogest, due to its performance-enhancing, anabolic effects, is classified as a prohibited doping substance under Annex I of the ADMR (Anti-Doping and Medication Control Rules for Equestrian Sports).

Prostaglandin F2alpha ($PGF_{2\alpha}$)

PGF2α and its analogs (e.g. Dinoprost) are specific prostaglandins that enhance muscle tone in the uterus and contraction of bronchial muscles.[83] In sows, these are used for scheduled induction of labor due to their labor-inducing effects. They also enhance uterine contractions in the postpartum phase, helping to shorten either a naturally prolonged or pathologically delayed afterbirth phase. This ensures that there are no delays in the subsequent birthing protocol. These substances are administered either intramuscularly or subcutaneously. The side effects of using PGF2α and its analogs are significant: in pregnant sows and gilts, administration of the veterinary drug can lead to increased body temperature, increased respiratory rate, excessive salivation, increased defecation and urination, skin redness, and general restlessness (such as arching of the back, pawing, and rubbing or gnawing on the pen). These symptoms resemble the natural behavior of sows before a normal birth, but they occur over a much shorter period, which can cause additional stress for the sow.

Oxytocin

Oxytocin is a peptide hormone with various effects throughout the body. In the female body, it is released toward the end of pregnancy and triggers labor by stimulating contraction of the smooth muscles in the uterus.[84] In addition to its therapeutic use in cases of pathological labor weakness, oxytocin is routinely used to induce labor earlier in sows, thereby facilitating the initiation and acceleration of piglet births (see the section on labor induction and acceleration). The listed side effects[76] can be serious in this context.

- Uterine hypercontractility
- Uterine rupture
- Persistent uterine contraction with umbilical cord flow blockage, fetal hypoxia (oxygen deficiency), and reduced viability of the fetuses as a consequence
- Prolonged duration of labor, premature placental detachment

All these potential side effects represent life-threatening and high-risk complications during the birthing process. The risk of their occurrence is accepted in pursuit of economic goals.

Carbetocin

Carbetocin is a synthetic derivative of Oxytocin. In sows, it is also used to shorten the total duration of labor as part of birthing synchronization.[76] It is metabolized more slowly in the body, resulting in a longer duration of action (in pigs at least 6 hours). Consequently, both the effects and side effects are difficult to manage.[85]

The hormone, like Oxytocin, should not be used to accelerate labor when the cervix is not dilated or when mechanical obstructions are the cause of delayed labor. It is questionable to what extent farm personnel can reliably assess this situation.

Administration of Hormones and associated Pain and Stress for the Animal

Almost all hormones are administered to sows either intramuscularly or subcutaneously. Such injections are always associated with stress and tissue trauma, which can cause pain and inflammatory reactions.[86] Studies have demonstrated numerous stress and pain responses in both sows and piglets following needle injections compared to needle-free intradermal injections, which are approved for certain vaccinations. Stress or pain vocalizations, escape attempts, and aversive behaviors occur significantly more frequently in pigs during and after needle injections,[87,88] piglets also show reduced suckling behavior more frequently after needle injections[89] compared to needle-free injections. Furthermore, the development of avoidance and fear behaviors in sows towards personnel after repeated needle injections has been documented,[88] indicating significant insights into the stress response that sows are subjected to during painful injections. The animal welfare relevance of oral administration of Altrenogest in individual housing, as well as the risk of unreliable dosing in group housing, should be emphasized once again.

These treatments, when performed without a veterinary indication, represent an unjustifiable strain for the individual animal.

Evaluation of the Non-Therapeutic Use of Hormones in Sow Farming from an Animal Welfare Perspective

The hormonal manipulation of the reproductive cycle and control of birthing in sows constitutes a severe intervention in their physiological metabolism, which has been scientifically proven to have adverse health effects on both sows and their piglets. A large proportion of sows suffer throughout their lives from undiagnosed diseases of their reproductive organs. Sows are depleted within a few years due to hormonally enforced high performance, currently reaching an age of only three to four years[56,90] before they are slaughtered due to declining productivity. Each year in Germany, around 500,000 sows fail to reach even this age due to management-induced reproductive disorders and are slaughtered prematurely. Over 100,000 sows succumb to their suffering. The exceptionally high piglet mortality rates reveal that millions of animals do not survive this purely economically driven breeding management. Without medical necessity, sows are exposed to extreme stress, pain, and severe health risks.

This demonstrates a significant impairment of the health, welfare, and overall well-being of breeding sows and their piglets as a result of the structural use of hormones.

The German Animal Welfare Federation (Deutscher Tierschutzbund e.V.) regards the use of hormones without medical indication as a violation of animal welfare and calls for a ban on the non-therapeutic use of hormones for the purpose of performance enhancement.

Zootechnical Measures as an Alternative

Even ecologically operated farms or those participating in especially animal-friendly programs must be organized in terms of labor efficiency. They are subject to the same demands of the food industry regarding the predictability of processing schedules and the supply of predefined quantities of meat and animal products. Therefore, even they cannot avoid oestrus synchronization of their sows. However, they completely refrain from using hormones for cycle synchronization. Animal observation and animal-friendly housing, optimal management, and especially animal health play an extremely important role here. Poor housing conditions, stress, and diseases negatively affect reproduction. Through so-called zootechnical measures, the fertility of a sow can be naturally controlled by designing an animal-friendly environment and selectively applying environmental stimuli.[91] In this approach, the individual cycle speed of each sow is still considered. In organic pig farming, which, according to EU Organic Regulation 2018/848[3], prohibits any non-medical use of hormones, practices such as sufficient boar contact, optimal light and air conditions, adequate movement and enrichment are required. Essential to this is also expert animal observation by farm personnel. Through animal-friendly management, oestrus synchronization of physically and mentally healthy sows can be successfully, and animal welfare-compliantly practiced without hormonal intervention.

However, it must be noted that even hormone-free oestrus synchronization of sows is carried out for economic reasons, to meet consumer behavior demands.

Demands of the German Animal Welfare Federation (Deutscher Tierschutzbund e.V. - DTSchB)

Based on the findings regarding the negative effects of hormone use in sows and the existence of zootechnical alternatives, the German Animal Welfare Federation (Deutscher Tierschutzbund e.V.) calls for a legal ban on veterinary medicines used for performance enhancement and profit optimization. Many veterinary medicines, particularly those containing hormonally active substances, come with serious side effects, which should only be used when medically necessary and after weighing the benefits for the animal. The routine use of such substances for optimizing an animal's performance should, under no circumstances, be allowed.

A responsible and voluntary renouncement by breeding associations is long overdue. This is shown by the Swiss Farmers' Association, which sets a positive example, albeit only in the case of the hormone eCG due to its cruel methods of extraction from pregnant mares. In 2022, the Livestock Commission of the Swiss Farmers' Association (SBV) decided to discontinue the use of eCG in domestic animal breeding. As a result, since September 1, 2022, the use of eCG has been banned for all animal categories on 95 percent of Swiss farms.[92]

The German Animal Welfare Federation (Deutscher Tierschutzbund e.V.) calls on German breeding associations to voluntarily renounce hormonal reproductive control in pigs, as long as a legal ban is not yet in place.

At the European level, the DTSchB, as a member of the Eurogroup for Animals, advocates for a EU-wide ban on the use of hormones in breeding sow management.

Disclosure

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The German Animal Welfare Federation (Deutscher Tierschutzbund) was founded in 1881 as the umbrella organization for animal welfare associations and animal shelters in Germany. Today, it is made up of 16 state associations and around 740 local animal welfare societies, with 550 affiliated animal shelters/rescue stations. It is the largest animal welfare umbrella organization in Germany and Europe, and also an officially recognized nature conservation association. (As of 01.01.2022)

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