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Sustainably into the future

The Danish pork sector is driving sustainable developments with great speed. Among other things, the kingdom has been highly effective in reducing antibiotic use, improving animal health and welfare and reducing emissions.

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The pork congress held late last year in Herning made it clear which direction the Danish pork sector is heading. During the conference, over 2,200 professionals defined three overarching target areas for the future: animal welfare and social acceptance, sustainability and certification, and competitiveness. Animal welfare efforts will focus on eliminating tail-docking, castrating piglets only under local anesthesia and ensuring higher piglet survival rates. "We have already invested much time into exploring alternatives to tail-docking and are about to test these in various agricultural production units," reports Christian Fink Hansen, Sector Director of the SEGES Danish Pig Research Centre in the Danish Association of Agriculture and the Food Industry. Since January 1, 2019, by the



Since January 1, 2019, male piglets in Denmark can only be castrated under local anesthesia. Danish Agriculture & Food Council - Bild: Danish Agriculture & Food Council

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way, male piglets in Denmark can only be castrated under local anesthesia. Producers and employees are now learning the appropriate methods. For years, the kingdom has accelerated the development of free-range holding of sows. Free-range holding of pregnant sows and those ready to mate is already common practice. The industry also wants to advance free-range holding in farrowing accommodations and is working on innovative systems to meet these needs.

The animal welfare seal for pork nationally introduced by Germany's neighbor in spring 2017 is highly popular with Danish consumers. This is shown by the results of a consumer survey held on behalf of the veterinary and food directorate by the market research company Yougov. Accordingly, two-thirds of respondents consider the label to be trustworthy and over three-quarters of interviewees also specify that a commitment to more animal welfare is important to them.

In the opinion of the Sector Director Christian Fink Hansen, sustainability could become one of the world's central sales parameters in the future. In Denmark, efforts to introduce uniform certification for all aspects of pig production – from breeding to fattening – are therefore being launched.

Further reductions in emissions

In the area of sustainable and resource-saving food production, the Danish pork sector has already achieved much in past decades. According to the Danish trade association of the Agriculture & Food Industry, the branch is among the front-runners in Europe as far as environmental efficiency is concerned. The environmental impact per kilogram of pork, for example, has been reduced by around 50 percent since 1985.

The lasting reduction of ammonia emissions is at the top of the agenda. A series of measures begun in 1990 has contributed to reductions in total ammonia emissions in Danish pig production of around 40 percent – accompanied by production increases of over 50 percent. The sector is striving for further reductions of 40 percent by the year 2020.

To achieve this goal, agricultural producers are relying on modern technologies in manure treatment and air purification in stables. Many, for example, already use the innovative “Agri Airclean” air purification system. This system relies on photochemical purification technology that can free stable air of 90 percent of ammonia and odor emissions.

New cooperation start-up

Phosphorus emissions in Denmark are also dropping. Since 1985, the excreta per kilogram of pork have been reduced by more than half. In recent years, the SEGES Danish Pig Research Centre in the Danish Association of Agriculture and the Food Industry has extensively researched the reduction of phosphorus content in pig feed. They have found that it can be significantly reduced through the use of the enzyme phytase, among other things. This reduces overall phosphorus excretions.

Keyword feed. Most Danish pig farmers use feed from regional crop production. To become even more independent of soy imports, the sector is also promoting the cultivation of native protein crops. Recently, Germany’s neighbor has started a project called “Danish Protein Innovation”. In this partnership, leading manufacturers of feed ingredients and foods work together with research institutions to develop sustainable proteins for animal feed and nutrition as well as pharmaceutical products.

“We start where there is great potential and research has already made great progress, particularly in the production of plant protein – primarily from grass – for use as feed,” explains Lars Hvidtfeldt, who leads the partnership as a representative of the Danish trade association of the Agriculture & Food Industry.

Even fewer antibiotics

Denmark has been successful for years in the sustainable reduction of antibiotic use. According to information from the Danish trade association, the use of pharmaceuticals in Danish livestock production is less than one-third of the EU average. In 2017, the sector used around 3.4 tons less antibiotics than in the previous year – a three percent decline and the fourth yearly reduction in a row. Because pork makes up around 85 percent of Danish meat production, the reductions were achieved primarily in this area. In 2017, production-related doses of antibiotics were lowered by four percent. According to the latest EU statistics, the use of pharmaceuticals in the Danish livestock industry in 2016, at 40.8 mg per kilogram of biomass, was less than one-third of the corresponding EU average of 124.6 mg per kilogram of biomass.

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