

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001418/20
to the Commission
Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE)
(9 March 2020)**

Subject: Surgical castration of pigs

Surgical castration of pigs is still practised in the EU, but over time the European institutions, animal welfare organisations and farmers have worked to end it in favour of immunocastration or leaving pigs entire.

Immunocastration is known to be a safe practice, is authorised by competent authorities around the world, and radically reduces stress, pain and discomfort in pigs.

The meat of immunocastrated animals is safe for consumers to eat. There is no evidence of health problems ever being generated by the vaccines, which are authorised and available around the world.

Nevertheless, in some countries such as China cultural factors seem to hinder the spread of this welfare-friendly alternative to surgical castration, apparently based on confusion with hormone treatments and on unsubstantiated safety fears. This is having an impact on the practices adopted by some European farmers, who feel that they must go back to surgical castration in order to trade with China.

The EU institutions need to become actively involved in order to prevent unfounded fears undermining long-due progress on this front.

Does the Commission intend to have formal contacts with the Chinese authorities to promote immunocastration or the farming of entire pigs as valid alternatives to surgical castration?

**Answer given by Ms Kyriakides on behalf of the European Commission
(8 May 2020)**

The Commission outlined in its reply to Written Question E-004029/2019 that castration of male pigs is subject to Directive 2008/120/EC ⁽¹⁾, requiring that a veterinarian must perform the castration under anaesthetic and additional prolonged analgesia after the seventh day of life of the piglet.

In 2019, the Commission published a study ⁽²⁾ *establishing best practices on the production, the processing and the marketing of meat from uncastrated pigs or pigs vaccinated against boar taint (immunocastrated)*. This study was part of a pilot project proposed by the European Parliament. As a follow up, the Commission is now disseminating the best practices established by the study. The dissemination materials are foreseen to be translated also into Chinese.

The Commission has regular contacts with the Chinese competent authorities where, *inter alia*, animal welfare issues are discussed and promoted. The Commission will further develop the cooperation on animal welfare with the Chinese authorities bearing in mind their sovereignty to apply those rules in their territory.

⁽¹⁾ Council Directive 2008/120/EC of 18 December 2008 laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs (OJ L47, 18.2.2009, p. 5).

⁽²⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare/practice/farm/pigs/castration_alternatives_en