



Sample grocers' letter

October 26, 2011

Grocer's name

Address

Municipality, province

Postal code

Dear.....,

**Re: Ending surgical castration of pigs in Canada**

A group of ten Canadian, U.S. and European animal protection organizations wrote to you on February 22, 2010, about ending surgical pig castration in Canada. We are writing now because of new developments.

It is common practice in Canada for pig producers to surgically castrate piglets without pain relief, even though scientific evidence shows piglets experience acute and prolonged pain from this procedure. The purpose of surgical castration is to stop boar taint which occurs occasionally in meat from intact males.

The recently revised Canadian code of practice for dairy cattle (2009) requires pain control during castration, regardless of the animal's age or method.

It is reasonable, then, that other sentient animals such as pigs should have pain relief for castration, too. The revision of Canada's code of practice for pigs is now underway, and castration is likely to be a hot topic. It is absolutely beneficial to use pain relief in surgical castration, but a **better solution is not to castrate pigs at all**, as is now happening in Europe.

In European and international markets, there are different views on pig castration and non-castration, and pain relief if castration is carried out. Some nations do not surgically castrate, while others require pain relief for surgical castration.

To come together on the issue, the European Commission and representatives from European farmers, meat industry, traders, retailers, scientists, veterinarians and animal welfare NGOs have committed to **a plan to voluntarily end surgical castration of pigs by January 1, 2018**. The parties have signed a European Declaration on alternatives to surgical castration on pigs which sets the basis for voluntary cooperation among the stakeholders. The Declaration is the first of its kind at the EU level for animal welfare.

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To reach their goal, an international conference in Amsterdam titled *Boars heading for 2018*, will take place November 30 - December 1, 2011, to discuss challenges and changes in the marketing of the meat of non-castrated male pigs. For conference information, see <http://boars2018.com/conference/>

**Economic advantages of not castrating:**

- Improved feed conversion in intact males, with lower feed costs;
- Less manure produced (from less feed consumed) – a boon for the environment;
- No costs to do the castrations (labour, equipment, and veterinary medicines);
- Savings of approximately \$15 Canadian per male pig.

Boar taint is not as prevalent as once thought. Dutch slaughterhouses have found only 2-3% of boars actually exhibit boar taint, and when it is detected, the meat is re-directed for cooking where the odor is eliminated, so none is wasted.

There are numerous management techniques to avoid boar taint, including

- Slaughtering males earlier, at lower weights, and rearing only females to higher weights;
- Use of skatole-reducing feeds, e.g. chicory;
- Avoid mixing pigs during transport and at abattoir lairage;
- Rest after unloading and careful handling at the slaughterhouse;
- Genetic selection; and
- Sexed semen.

*(Peter Stevenson, Compassion in World Farming)*

Canadian food retailers can specify meat from intact males and obtain a commitment from abattoir suppliers to accommodate intact male pigs. An example is the Netherlands, where most Dutch supermarkets have stopped selling meat from castrated pigs, and McDonald's and Burger King no longer use meat from castrated pigs.

As Europe moves to end surgical castration of pigs by 2018, so too can Canada, with advantages for all. Ending castration is a win-win situation because it decreases animal pain and increases profits for the producer.

We look forward to your thoughts and questions.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Brown, Director  
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