
PRESS RELEASE

Woolworths Becomes First Major South African Retailer To Introduce Sow-Friendly Pork Products

August 2014

Woolworths has announced that from the end of September, all fresh pork sold at Woolworths will be sourced from farms that no longer use sow stalls to restrain pregnant sows. The introduction of sow-friendly pork is a first for South African retailers and represents another milestone on our Good Business Journey.

This is the first phase of an initiative that will see all Woolworths South African pork products produced in a way that is much more humane and kinder for the sows by the end of this year.

This move represents a major departure from standard practice in South Africa, where sows are kept in restrictive stalls for the entire 16-week pregnancy period. Sow stalls allow the pregnant sows to stand up and lie down, but not to turn around. Now Woolworths supplier farms will keep pregnant sows in group housing where they will have the freedom to move around and socialise.

Customers will begin seeing “Kinder to Sows” stickers on fresh pork at Woolworths from the end of September 2014. From the end of December 2014, all Woolworths branded fresh processed and cured pork products, such as bacon, boerewors and sausages, will follow the same farming practices as fresh. We also aim to achieve this for all other local pork products such as cooked hams, deli meats, pizzas, sandwiches and pies by the end of July 2015. Imported Woolworths branded pork products will comply with EU or UK legislation.

“We would like to thank our supplier partners for joining us in giving sows a better quality of life,” says Woolworths Managing Director of Foods, Zyda Rylands. “This is a wonderful example of what can be achieved through our supplier partnerships and goes to show how together, we can lead change.”

Adds Rylands, “Along with our customers, we have wanted to address this issue of humane treatment of animals for a number of years. I am sure that they will be happy to know that they will soon be able to buy more humanely produced pork at Woolies.”

Compassion in World Farming has welcomed the Woolworths announcement. “We are extremely pleased that Woolworths and their pig farmers are changing the way sows are treated. We hope that other producers will soon follow suit,” says the organisation’s spokesperson, Louise van der Merwe.

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Q&A

What is a sow stall?

Sow stalls, sometimes referred to as gestation crates, are cages in which individual sows are confined in intensive pig production. The stalls are extremely restrictive and do not allow for free and natural movement of the sow. The sow can only stand up and lie down, but is unable to turn around. It is only the sows that are kept in the stalls, not the pigs that we eat. This change means that when you buy Woolworths pork it will be from pigs born to sows that do not spend their entire pregnancy in a tiny sow stall.

Woolworths has moved from confining the sow for the full pregnancy of 16 weeks down to a couple of days when, for ease of handling, the sow is required to be in a sow stall for insemination until pregnancy is confirmed.

Does this mean Woolworths pork farmers will no longer be using weaning crates (sometimes known as farrowing crates)?

No, this change in our farming policy only applies to sow stalls. We are on journey so the removal of sow stalls is the first step as they make the greatest impact on the sows’ quality of life.

What are weaning crates?

Weaning crates are similar to sow stalls but are bigger in that they allow the sow to lie on her side so that the piglets can suckle. On Woolworths supplying farms the sow will be moved to the Weaning Crate a day or two before giving birth to her litter. She will remain there until the piglets are weaned at 21 to 28 days.

Why are weaning crates necessary?

Weaning crates allow the farmer easy access to and control of the sow during the birth of her litter and during the weaning phase. The industry believes that the crates prevent the sow from lying on her piglets.

Why not expand our free range pork products?

Woolworths has been trying to expand our free range pork offering over the years but sourcing 'true free range' pork that is available all year round and is competitively priced has been very challenging. Consequently we have rather focused on tackling some of the practices used in intensive farming and improving the lives of over a hundred thousand sows across the country. We will continue to source viable free range options that meet our free range standards.

Woolworths Good Business Journey

Our Good Business Journey is our sustainability programme, which is a comprehensive plan to make a difference in six priority areas: sustainable farming, protecting water supplies, reducing energy use, improving the management of waste, making a significant contribution to social development and supporting transformation initiatives. These are all challenges facing, not only South Africa, but the world at large.

As part of our commitment to sustainable farming, we're partnering with suppliers to find ways to produce products that cause minimum harm to the environment and improve farming practices, including the humane treatment of animals in our supply chain.