

**Department of animal environment and health**

Section of Anthrozoology and Applied Ethology

## Working conditions at slaughter transport of pigs in Sweden

Researchers at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) have together with researchers at Lund University and the University of Melbourne investigated working conditions of Swedish transport drivers during loading and unloading of pigs. The results are now published, see the link below.

In Sweden, about a hundred drivers transport 2.5 million pigs for slaughter each year. Commonly, modern three-level vehicles (truck and trailer) with a total capacity of 200-300 slaughter pigs are used, which lead to a high center of gravity and unsecured load. The drivers are responsible for the pigs from loading to unloading. Between 11 and 20 drivers participated in the different parts of the study. Working conditions were studied by measurement of the drivers' physical workload and a survey concerning working conditions, work-related discomfort and psychosocial working environment.

The results show that the drivers had confidence in their work abilities and were committed to their work. Working conditions varied, both between drivers and work tasks. Most of the participants reported discomfort in knees, shoulders and lower back. High arm elevations during the more active tasks – loading, unloading and washing of vehicles – indicated a high load on shoulders. Extreme crouching postures when working in the bottom level of the vehicle at the end of loading and at the beginning of unloading indicated a high load on the back. Poor design of the farm's loading area, such as poor lighting, incorrect proportions or lack of



protection from wind and direct sunlight, was reported to increase the risk of knee problems due to difficulties in loading pigs. Poor designs also decreased the possibilities to detect dirty, sick or injured pigs, unfit for transport.

The study also revealed that drivers experienced difficulties in communicating with both farmers and official veterinarians at abattoirs. TDs experienced stress due to diverse assessments of pigs' health status made by different official veterinarians at unloading, and due to conflicts with farmers when rejecting unfit pigs during loading. Moreover, perceived competition from other haulier companies, complicated and sometimes conflicting regulations, and time pressure were reported. There is a risk of TDs registering washing of vehicles as a break, and an unexpectedly long loading time increases the risk of violations of regulations regarding drivers' rest, or maximum transport time of pigs.

Haulier companies are subcontractors to abattoirs and the drivers sometimes end up in difficult situations. It is difficult for individual drivers to influence problems caused by demands for increased production efficiency or competition between haulier companies. By improving drivers' working conditions, the opportunities for professional handling of pigs increase, which reduces the risk of high workload and stress levels in pigs. Farmers should therefore try to provide loading areas that enable calm and ordered pig handling, and the abattoirs well-equipped washing areas. Abattoirs and haulier companies should enter into contracts that prevent risks of stress and violation of regulations. Farmers, hauliers, official veterinarians and abattoir managers would all benefit from agreeing on how transport work should be performed to meet the need for professional and sustainable drivers. And it would improve pig welfare during transport.

The study was financed by the research council Formas and conducted in collaboration with Transportfackens yrkes- och arbetsmiljönämnd (TYA) and voluntary haulier companies and drivers.

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*Picture: pigs in the lowest level of a three-levelled trailer. Photo taken by Sofia Wilhelmsson*