

Producers' preferences for traits important in pig production

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Traditionally both the traits included in breeding goals, and the relative importance of these traits has been determined solely by the economic return associated with the genetic gain. However, over the last decade the interest in additional non-market values, such as animal welfare and environmental impact, has increased as a response to changes in consumer preferences, societal values and political decisions. In the long run, it is the consumers' demand in pig meat, together with society's laws and regulations, that determine how pig meat is produced and thus how breeding companies design their breeding programmes. Breeding companies are, however, dependent on the demand of animal material from commercial producers, who have the experience of how the animals function in practice and ultimately decide what animal material they want to buy. There is a lack in knowledge on producers' preferences, especially for alternative pig production systems. How do the producers value different breeding goal traits?

We investigate producers' preferences regarding traits of pigs important in their production system using an advanced web-based questionnaire. The interactive questionnaire was sent out to Swedish pig producers (519 herds) in February 2012, and will be closed in March 2012. Herdsmen are asked to state which traits they intuitively consider important in their herd, rank 15 given traits against each other, weigh traits against each other given the estimated genetic gain (calculated based on selection index theory, within the questionnaire) and indicate to what extent they consider traits to be related to productivity, environmental impact and animal welfare. The preferences are compared between different classes of herd characteristics such as herd size, herdsman's experience, production orientation (e.g. piglet production or production of pigs for slaughter or both) and production system (e.g. conventional or organic). Finally, the agreement between producers' preferences and the breeding goal for the animal material currently used will be assessed.

Reference: Wallenbeck, A., Ahlman, T., Ljung, M. and Rydhmer, L. Producers' preferences for traits important in pig production. The 63rd meeting of the European Association for Animal Production (EAAP), Bratislava, Slovakia. p.333.