



## Immunocastration of pigs should be allowed in organic production

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The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) - representing around 300 000 veterinarians across 40 European countries - strongly believes that immunocastration of piglets fits within the conditions for organic farming and its objectives. The main reasons for this are:

- 1) Immunocastration is better for animal welfare than surgical castration, which is regularly used in organic farming
- 2) Immunocastration is similar to other treatments, widely accepted in organic farming, that work on the immune system such as vaccinations
- 3) Immunocastration is not a hormone treatment and does not carry a risk for hormonal residues

**FVE urges the EU Commission's Standing Committee for Organic Farming to reconsider its opinion and accept that immunocastration complies with the principles of organic farming of pigs .**

In order to avoid boar taint and problems with aggression between uncastrated male pigs, pig farmers in many EU countries castrate nearly all male pigs surgically, and mostly without using anaesthesia and analgesia. This is an important animal welfare problem and is not consistent with a vision of sustainable animal agriculture. For this reason, several countries have committed to phasing out the practice of surgically castrating piglets. This was also agreed in the European Declaration on alternatives to surgical castration of pigs which set a goal to phase out the surgical castration of pigs by 2018 in all European Union (EU) and all European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries.

The alternatives to surgical castration of pigs are raising entire males or immunocastration, the latter being recognised as the most welfare-friendly option for the pigs.

Some mistakenly believe that immunocastration is incompatible with organic farming because it alters the production of an animal's reproductive hormones. However, surgical removal of a male pig's gonads, permitted in organic farming, similarly affects the production of the pig's reproductive hormones.

It is important to note that immunocastration is a vaccine and not a hormonal treatment. There is no risk for residues. The vaccine stimulates the vaccinated piglets to form antibodies against their own gonadotrophin-releasing hormone (GnRH) producing a temporary immunological suppression of testicular function.

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This prevents the storage of androstenone and skatole in the fatty tissue of male pigs, which causes the sexual odour (boar taint).

**To conclude:** immunocastration is a technique based on the use of a vaccine, not a hormone. The injection of the vaccine is far less invasive than surgical castration. It is therefore an animal welfare-friendly method to prevent boar taint.

Organic farming is seen by many consumers as the most sustainable and animal-friendly method of production. Immunocastration is required as a permitted alternative to surgical castration within organic production.

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#### Notes to Editors

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of veterinary organisations from 39 European countries, representing a total of around 300 000 veterinarians. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) strives to promote animal health, animal welfare and public health across Europe.

For further information, consult the FVE website [www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)  
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Extra information:

- [FVE position paper on pig castration](#)
- [European Declaration on alternatives towards surgical castration of pigs](#)
- [European Medicines Agency – Scientific discussion EPAR paper](#)
- [FVE publication on ‘Pig castration: will the EU manage to ban pig castration by 2018?’](#)