

Outdoor pigs in good health

The health of organic and outdoor pigs is good, in general. However, there are challenges too for organic producers, who must have strong focus on management, for instance.



Outdoor pigs are in good health.

Photo: LandbrugsMedierne (Agricultural Media) By Thyge Hansen, thh@lf.dk

This is one of the conclusions from the workshop "Happy Pigs' Health", recently held by SEGES Organic Farming and Center of Development for Outdoor Livestock Production. Eleven of the foremost experts and researchers in the field were gathered at the workshop. The purpose was to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the general health of organic and outdoor pig herds.

- We have missed an overview of the knowledge and research that exist in Denmark, for instance in order to see where to take action, in terms of improving pig health and welfare, says specialist adviser Merete Studnitz, SEGES Organic Farming.

Special attention required

Although the bottom line shows a fine state of health in the herds, the workshop also revealed a number of points that may be problematic and which need special attention.

- We see, for instance, the occurrence of significant problems such as tail biting and respiratory infections. These problems, however, appear with great variation between herds. Data from the meat control show that the most prevalent disease is chronic pleuritis, which indicates that the pig has had pneumonia, says Merete Studnitz.

Characteristic of outdoor pigs is damage caused by weather, wind, and the surrounding environment, for example sunburn, insect bites, parasites, or being crushed by the sow.



See European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

- Outdoor life gives a different disease and damage picture than life in a pen. There is a need for developing methods to assess the level of welfare associated with an outdoor pig life. This might help give a qualified holistic picture of the welfare of organic and outdoor pigs, says Merete Studnitz.

Management is crucial

According to the conclusions of the workshop, the best way to ensure the pigs' health is through good management.

- Management is the single most important factor to ensure organic and outdoor pig health, especially when the pigs are in large groups, as the risk of spread of infectious diseases is higher. Careful monitoring of the pigs is extremely important in order to ensure that sick animals are identified quickly and disease is handled correctly, says Merete Studnitz.

She points out that herd data from the meat control can be a good support tool in terms of health management at farm-level as well as for benchmarking against comparable herds. With support from the advisory service specific action plans can be worked out to help target the procedures.

- SEGES Organic Farming will, in cooperation with already existing initiatives, make sure that producers of outdoor organic pigs have the best possibilities to ensure their pigs' health, says Merete Studnitz.