

AN HSUS REPORT: Undercover Exposés at Two of the Nation’s Largest Pork Producers

BACKGROUND:

The U.S. pork industry confines roughly 70 percent of its breeding pigs in gestation crates – two foot wide metal cages that permanently confine animals, preventing them from *even turning around* for virtually their entire lives. Dr. Temple Grandin, renowned animal welfare scientist and advisor to both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the pork industry itself, unequivocally states that, “We’ve got to treat animals right, and the gestation stalls have got to go.” Dr. Grandin continues, “Confining an animal for most of its life in a box in which it is not able to turn around does not provide a decent life.”

Eight U.S. states and the European Union have passed legislation to outlaw the use of gestation crates and the nation’s largest pork producer—Smithfield Foods—announced plans to end its use of gestation crates all company-owned breeding facilities by 2017. Sadly, most U.S. pig producers remain stagnant on this issue.

THE INVESTIGATIONS:

In late 2011, HSUS undercover investigators worked at two Goodwell, Oklahoma pig breeding facilities—one owned by Seaboard Foods and the other by Prestage Farms. Seaboard is the nation’s third-largest pork producer, and a supplier to Walmart. On its website, Seaboard touts its involvement with Dr. Temple Grandin, despite her staunch opposition to gestation crates. Prestage is the nation’s fifth-largest pork producer. The Seaboard facility confines roughly 2,700 sows in gestation crates and the Prestage facility confines roughly 2,500 sows in gestation crates.

The investigations, which lasted 30 and 14 days respectively, offer further unequivocal proof of the inherent and extreme abuse associated with gestation crate confinement, as well as the urgent need for reform in the U.S. pork industry.

Specific findings at Seaboard Foods:

- Pigs in gestation crates had untreated sores and abscesses.



- An employee was witnessed repeatedly abusing pigs by smacking their genitals, pulling their hair, jabbing their eyes, and hitting them with gate rods to move them between crates.
- Several of the gestation crates overflowed with feces and urine, which bubbled up from below the slatted floors from a system clog, covering the pigs with waste.
- Pigs bit at the bars of their crates and tried to push their crate doors up – both indications of frustration.
- Dead pigs were found in gestation crates and pens.
- A pregnant pig with a severely torn and bleeding vulva was not seen by a veterinarian; she was forced to give birth rather than being euthanized. The farm manager informed the investigator they would not euthanize the pig because she had piglets to deliver (euthanizing the pig would cost Seaboard the piglets). Asked if giving birth would be painful, the manager replied that pigs “can handle some pain.”
- Some pigs were held in filthy pens in which urine and feces were allowed to build up for a week before being pressure-washed, sending feces into adjoining gestation crates and troughs from which the pigs ate and drank.
- Piglets with splayed legs had their hind legs duct-taped to their bodies. When the manager saw the investigator’s face as the tape was being painfully ripped from the piglets, he assured the investigator that using the duct tape was “not abuse” and said that pigs can “take a lot of pain.”



In stark contrast to these findings, Seaboard claims on its website and in a company-generated report that it is “committed to proper animal care,” has “a moral and ethical obligation to the humane treatment of animals” and that the company uses “...the most humane practices throughout the animal’s life. Not only is this the right thing to do, but it’s scientifically proven to provide better pork quality.” In addition, Seaboard claims to “... implement the latest technology and practices to ensure our animals remain calm and comfortable” and that its animals live “free from cruelty.” Because these claims are false and misleading, The HSUS has filed complaints with the Securities and Exchange Commission and Federal Trade Commission seeking agency action to protect shareholders and consumers from Seaboard’s deception about animal welfare.

Specific findings at Prestage Farms:

- Pigs desperate to escape their crates injured and bloodied their noses and mouths.
- Pigs confined in gestation crates showed stereotypic behaviors (such as bar-biting, gate pushing, moving repetitively back and forth and swaying their heads), which indicates poor welfare.
- Dead sows were found in gestation crates.
- Many sows had wounds from the gestation crate bars constantly rubbing against them. One pig had an abscess so infected that pus leaked steadily from it and gushed with the slightest pressure. The facility’s assistant manager explained that this could have been caused by fecal and urine bacteria entering the site of an injection.
- Feces and urine falling outside of the gestation crates was shoveled back into the crates so the sows could sit and stand in it in order to push it through the slatted floors into the manure pit below them.

GESTATION CRATE-FREE PRODUCTION OFFERS MANY IMPROVEMENTS AND IS GROWING:

The welfare of pigs can be significantly improved simply by removing them from gestation crates and allowing them freedom of movement and the ability to engage in some natural behaviors. The alternative, called “group housing,” allows pigs to live in groups, rather than individual confinement cages.

In addition to being better for animals, group housing has been shown in at least one study to have **economic benefits** as well. A two-and-a-half year Iowa State University [study](#) found that raising pigs in groups instead of gestation crates could reduce the cost per piglet to producers by 11 percent. “We found reproductive performance can be maintained or enhanced in well-managed group housing systems for gestating sows,” said Mark Honeyman, animal science professor and coordinator of Iowa State's Research Farms. “We also found group housing may produce pigs at a lower cost than individual gestation stalls in confinement facilities.”

The **European Union** outlawed gestation crates (effective 2013). In the U.S., **eight states** have also passed laws to outlaw and phase out the use of gestation crates. These laws make sense considering the huge amount of public support for animal welfare. For example: an **American Farm Bureau**-funded study found that 95 percent of Americans think farm animals should be well cared for and a study by the food industry consulting firm **Technomic** found that animal welfare is the *third most-important social issue* to American restaurant patrons.

Numerous corporations are following this trend by incorporating gestation crate-free pork into their supply chains. These companies include **Burger King, Wendy's, Sonic, Carl's Jr., Hardee's** and **Quiznos**. Supermarket chains are also getting on board: **Safeway, Harris Teeter & Winn-Dixie** have policies to increase their gestation crate-free pork sales. Other companies—like **Whole Foods, Chipotle, and Wolfgang Puck**—only use gestation crate-free pork.

CONCLUSION:

Legislation, corporate policies, sound science, public opinion and economic data all support a transition from gestation crates to group housing. Additionally, numerous major pork producers have begun moving in this direction. But Seaboard and Prestage remain stagnant on the issue, confining their breeding sows in gestation crates with no end in sight. The HSUS urges these companies—and the entire pork industry—to announce a reasonable timeline for ending the use of these cruel, outdated devices.

For more information, please read The Humane Society of the United States' [full scientific report](#) on the welfare of pigs in gestation crates or visit www.humanesociety.org.



One of several dead sows documented at Prestage Farms.