GUIDELINES FOR FARMERS, TRANSPORTERS AND OFFICIAL VETERINARIANS TO ASSESS THE “FITNESS FOR TRANSPORT AND SLAUGHTER” OF SLAUGHTER PIGS

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Introduction

Legislative provisions related to animal transport and ante-mortem meat inspection of farm animals exist both at national and at European level. The Regulation (EC) No. 1/2005 characterizes the transport criteria that are to be met with regard to the animals’ health and welfare.

In accordance with this regulation it is prohibited to transport animals in a way that is likely to cause injury or undue suffering to them. It is also prohibited to transport injured animals or animals with physiological weaknesses or pathological conditions. Furthermore, animals that are only able to move with pain or with assistance or animals that have open wounds or severe organ prolapses are not allowed to be transported. This also applies to pregnant animals in advanced stages of gestation (>90%) or neonatal animals (<7 days of life).

The European Regulation (EC) No. 854/2004 defines specific exclusion criteria regarding the decision “fit for slaughter”, which is to be verified during the official ante-mortem inspection by the official veterinarian. That means that animals are “not fit for slaughter for human consumption”, if they have severe physiological or functional disorders.

And although these regulations are in force, there are disagreements regarding the decisions on the “fitness for transport” or the “fitness for slaughter” between farmers, transporters, official veterinarians and also official veterinarians among themselves.

Material and methods

In order to standardize these official decisions with high animal welfare relevance regarding “fitness for transport” and “fitness for slaughter” as well as to give farmers and transporters assistance to prevent the delivery of animals that are “not fit for transport” and/or “not fit for slaughter”, written guidelines and practical illustrations of the pathological alterations were developed in cooperation between the University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, the Food and Veterinary Authority of the District of Cloppenburg as well as the Pig Health Service of the Agricultural Chamber of the Federal State of Lower in Germany.

Results

The developed and validated guidelines contain practise-oriented cases exemplified by images and symptom descriptions such as cases with joint diseases, injuries or organ prolapses in different degrees of severity. For each case a tentative
diagnosis as well as a decision with regard to the assessment of the “fitness for transport” and the “fitness for slaughter” is given using a traffic light system (red, yellow, green). Furthermore, the guideline proposes precise instructions for concrete activities like reporting an offence to the Responsible Authority in the framework of the legislative to prevent animal cruelty (Figure 1, 2, 3).

Case 1:

**Symptom description:**
- Poor general condition
- Inability to stand or walk
- Necrosis of the tail

**Tentative diagnosis:**
- Ascending bacterial infection caused by the necrosis of the tail
- Abscesses in the spinal canal as cause for the inability to stand
- Sepsis which leads to the poor general condition

**Decisions:**

| fit for transport | “No” due to inability to stand or walk |
| fit for slaughter  | “No” due to the poor general condition and the risk of sepsis and multiple abscesses |

*Figure 1. Pig with tail necrosis and inability to stand.*

Case 2:

**Symptom description:**
- Intense bulge with superficial wound
- >50% of the space between abdominal wall and floor is involved
- Good general condition

**Tentative diagnosis:**
- Intense umbilical hernia

**Decisions:**

| fit for Transport | “No” due to severe organ prolapse |
| fit for Slaughter  | “Yes”, logistic slaughter:  
  • at the end of the day due to a high risk of accidental incising of the intestines |

*Figure 2. Pig with umbilical hernia.*
Case 3:

Symptom description:
- Wound with beginning granulation and fecal contamination
- Except for signs of pain, good general condition

Tentative diagnosis:
- Incisional laceration wound not older than 12 hours

Decisions:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>fit for transport</th>
<th>“Yes” with restrictions:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Separation of injured pig during transport to avoid attacks from other pigs</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>fit for slaughter</th>
<th>“Yes”, logistic slaughter:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Separation during lairage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Early slaughter to reduce pain of the injured animal</td>
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Further instruction
- ! • Unseparated transport: report of an offence
- Lead the farmer and/ or transporter to find and eliminate the cause for the incisional laceration

Discussion and conclusion

Although even images and symptom descriptions are not able to reflect a complete and realistic presentation of a case, if they are used as typical examples they are quite instructive tools within a guideline. By teaching this guideline to all relevant stakeholders along the food chain like farmers, transporters and official veterinarians, the majority of disagreements can be prevented as well as the still occurring deliveries of animals to slaughterhouses that are “not fit for transport” and/or “not fit for slaughter”.