



Sow Housing

SMART BRIEF

Animal Welfare Impact of Change:

Mixed

Environmental Impact of Change:

Negative

95% of pork farms use
maternity pens

\$350 cost to transition
away from
maternity pens
MILLION

Most pigs are raised in group pens. However, pregnant sows are typically kept in individual stalls called gestation crates or maternity pens. Maternity pens are used to provide sows a safe space during pregnancy. When housed in groups, sows often fight for food and dominance—threatening both the sow’s welfare and the pregnancy.

Veterinarians support maternity pens as a way to meet a sow’s needs. The American Association of Swine Veterinarians states that “categorically banning [maternity pens] will likely harm rather than improve animal wellbeing.” The AASV also notes, “Allowing sows to live in group pens gives them greater freedom of movement, but it requires the use of more elaborate—and less effective—management systems to limit injuries and food deprivation from social sorting.”

Animal activists, who oppose meat consumption generally, want to prohibit any use of maternity pens at any time. About 95% of pork produced in the United States comes from farms that house sows individually, either through their entire pregnancy or a significant portion of it.

