

# REPORT: GCAW NAJK NEXT GENERATION PIG FARMERS' STUDY TOUR

2<sup>ND</sup>-7<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2022

## STUDY TOUR TO SWEDEN FACILITATES KNOWLEDGE-SHARING, EXPERTISE DEVELOPMENT AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG DUTCH FARMERS

### BACKGROUND

GCAW and the Dutch Young Farmers' Association (NAJK) co-organised a week-long 'Next Generation Pig Farming' study tour to Sweden for an enthusiastic group of 17 young Dutch pig farmers. Visits and meetings were organised with a variety of expert stakeholders on topics including animal welfare, innovative housing, supply chain, finance, sustainability and regenerative agriculture. GCAW financed the programme using funds from the 20% of members' fees ringfenced for innovation.

### TOUR OBJECTIVES

The study tour programme was curated to achieve the following aims:

- Increase the knowledge and skills of next generation Dutch pig farmers, especially regarding animal welfare.
- Introduce the young farmers to Sweden's best practice approaches to animal welfare. Sweden has an advanced welfare programme in which tail docking of meat pigs and close confinement farrowing crates for sows (and piglets) are not permitted.
- Provide participants with opportunities for interactive learning and self-development.
- Facilitate knowledge-exchange and networking amongst the young farmers.

### TOUR ACTIVITIES

The comprehensive programme saw the young farmers meet with several expert stakeholders to discuss a range of relevant topics with a focus on animal welfare.

The tour participants were fortunate to engage with Swedish farmers through on-site and digital farm visits as well as informal social gatherings. The first farm visit to Hallagård Lantbruk in Kvänum, Västergötland introduced the young farmers to a business focussing on sustainability and animal welfare. The group received a warm welcome from fifth-generation farmer Anders Gunnarsson whose aim is to convert his business to a closed loop, fossil fuel-free ecosystem. Around 500 hectares of arable farmland produce crops to feed the 6,000 fattening pigs and to feed the farm's biogas digester. The digester produces fertiliser that is used on the farm's land thus making it a circular farming approach. The group was impressed that the large group of pigs - with tails intact - is housed in a modern and airy barn with automatic straw delivery. Access to outside paddocks helps to entertain the pigs and reduces feed competition - a risk factor for tail biting.

The study group travelled to Klagstorp, Skåne to visit a farm belonging to fourth-generation farmer Mattias Espert, the chair of the Swedish pig farmers association. At Smågris Syd AB, tour participants gained first-hand experience

of higher welfare pig breeding practices as the farm uses a distinctive design of free farrowing pens. The young farmers anticipate that these systems will become the legal norm in the EU in the near future.

The next generation farmers also learned about Mr Espert's experiences representing the interests of the Swedish pig farming industry.

The next generation farmers also received a digital tour of Bengt and Per Edsgård's organic pig farm, Edsbergs Gård, in Vålberg, Värmland. The 400 hectares of land include arable farmland for pig feed cultivation, forestry and rental homes. The farm switched to organic crop production in 2001 to fulfil market demand and converted to organic pig farming seven years later. The study group benefitted from hearing about the Edsgårds' approach to organic farming, particularly in relation to pig welfare. Bengt explained that the pigs have more space (compared to conventional farms) and are very active so tail biting is not an issue. He accepts the slower pig growth rates as part of the organic farming process. The next generation farmers were also interested to learn about the farm's eco credentials which were recognised by the municipality of Karlstad's Climate Prize 2021.

The study tour programme included networking opportunities for the young Dutch farmers with their Swedish peers. Some young Swedish pig, arable and dairy farmers joined the group for a 'speed dating-style' social gathering. The study group enjoyed the chance to share their experiences and to learn about how Swedish consumers really value domestically produced agricultural products.

The next generation farmers benefitted from interactions with experts on pig farming and animal welfare. Dr Heleen van de Weerd (GCAW) delivered a presentation on free farrowing as well as a presentation and workshop on environmental enrichment. The group also enjoyed an online discussion with Dr Jan Vugts, a senior advisor at HKScan, a Finnish meat manufacturer. Topics of particular interest included the Finnish government's financial support for welfare programmes, monitoring of welfare issues in slaughterhouses and practical tips on preventing tail biting.

In addition, the young farmers learnt from academics at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala as guests of Linda Keeling, Professor of animal welfare. The group received presentations from academics on four current pig welfare research areas: tail biting; intestinal function and probiotics; behavioural and health benefits of using silage as feed; and group housing of sows).

The final trip of the study tour was – fittingly – to the furthest downstream operator in the farming value chain, a retailer. At GCAW member, IKEA Food Services, in Malmö, the young farmers enjoyed hearing about the company's aim of connecting with the entire food supply value chain, including farmers, to improve its work on animal welfare, the environment and public health.

## TOUR OUTCOMES

The young Dutch farmers have gained valuable exposure to Swedish best practices in relation to pig farming, animal welfare and environmental sustainability. Through first-hand experience and interactive learning opportunities, the tour participants have expanded their understanding of the benefits and challenges of higher pig welfare and advanced environmental practices. The group also updated their peers who did not participate in the trip via daily reports on the NAJK website and through the members magazine. Furthermore, a post-tour meeting was organised at the Dutch Agriculture University in Wageningen to further discuss pig welfare and reflect on the tour experience. Thanks to the study trip, the next generation farmers have seen the potential of sustainable, higher welfare pig farming and now have a supportive network of colleagues and friends with which to shape the future of Dutch pig farming.