



**Ontario Farm Animal Council  
Hog Housing Backgrounder  
January 31, 2007**

**You were asking about hog housing...**

Announcements were made recently by major meat processing companies in the US and Canada that they will be moving their farm suppliers toward housing sows (female pigs) in groups over the next ten years.

**What does this mean?**

Housing animals, and sows in particular, is a complicated science. There is not an easy answer or quick fix to change. Moving to group housing over ten years is a responsible decision that will take significant industry investment and time. New barns can be built with group housing pens, and existing barns can change to it when it's time to renovate.

**About sow housing:**

Many farms now house pregnant female sows, often called "dry sows" individually in stalls. We moved sows out of pens and into individual sow stalls many years ago for animal welfare reasons. It's a tradeoff – the sow does not have a lot of space, but she is free to eat and drink without fear or aggressive behaviour from other sows. The same rationale goes into building dog kennels with individual pens.

New technology, such as electronic feeders, is giving farmers different options to house animals in groups without compromising their welfare by having to compete for food. Some farms already have these systems in place.

**What do farmers think?**

Farming is always evolving. Caring for animals is, and always has been, a critical part of livestock farming. It's what we do every day. If research and practical experience can show us a better way to do things, we're open to change. The most important thing for farmers is to ensure that each pig receives proper care, regardless of how it is housed.

**Looking to the future:**

This is not a new method or idea for housing sows. Some farms already keep their sows in groups. Farmers and industry partners have invested over \$500,000 on one project on sow housing at the Prairie Swine Centre so far. For more on farm animal welfare research, visit: [www.livestockwelfare.com](http://www.livestockwelfare.com) and look for the searchable database!