Within the EU Q-PorkChains project, the aim of this work was to identify the best adapted tool for assessing the economic sustainability of pig farms in various conventional and alternative production systems. This tool belongs to a package of tools aiming at a standardized assessment of the various dimensions of sustainability of pork production systems. These tools will be used in benchmarking of different current and future pork production systems.

Introduction
Within the Q Porkchains project a suite of tools have been developed to assess, under practical conditions, the sustainability of different pigmeat production systems.

At farm level it is essential to consider the farm’s economic health and profitability as the farmer’s first aim is to provide a correct and regular income to support his family and then pass on a viable farm.

The economic sustainability tool should be based on indicators that:

i) are practical, simple and easy to communicate
ii) comparable between systems and countries
iii) have an holistic approach (farm as a whole and not focused on the pig unit).

Review of existing tools
Many tools have been developed to assess sustainability, some of which take into account its economic aspect, as one of the three traditional pillars. However, no specific tool seems to deal exclusively with economic sustainability and there seems to be no specific tool for pig production either.

Six different tools from different horizons have been scrutinized. Some were currently being developed, some were long established and had already good benchmarking.

Proposed Tool
The IDEA method seemed to be the most appropriate tool to develop and adapt for the economic assessment of sustainability as:

- The basic data is available for Europe through FADN.
- Indicators are comparable and reproducible, the data calculation comprehensible.
- An operational benchmarking exists.

Through six indicators, it is based on the assessment of:

i) Economic viability: available income / worker compared to national minimum wage and economic specialization rate
ii) Independence: financial autonomy (total annuities compared to margin) and CAP subsidies dependence
iii) Transferability: operating capital transferability and farm efficiency (operating expenses as a proportion of the production value)

A score is given for each indicator and then summed up to give the global economic score: a value between 0 and 100 is thus obtained and the higher it is, the more sustainable is the farm!

Conclusion
The IDEA tool:

- Validated on field with good reports from farmers/technicians and easily usable
- Not based on pig production: validation necessary for indicators and their benchmarking

QPC application: case studies in Dk, F, ES, UK and NL (2008-2009)
- FADN data available for conventional systems should farmers be reluctant to communicate the economic data needed and data can be estimated for alternative systems
- Universal benchmarking can apply allowing different comparison levels: systems, regions and countries

Acknowledgments
The authors gratefully acknowledge from the European Community financial participation under the Sixth Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities, for the Integrated Project Q-PORKCHAINS FOOD-CT-2007-036245.