



TAIL BITING – RISK FACTORS FOR BEING BITTEN AND THE EFFECT OF STRAW ON TAIL LESION PREVALENCE

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STUDY 1: RISK FACTORS FOR BEING TAIL-BITTEN

Background

Previous studies show that the risk of being a victim of tail biting partly depends on characteristics of the victim itself.

Objective

To identify factors relating to the individual pig that are associated with an increased risk of being tail-bitten.

Materials and Methods

- Herds: - One herd with tail biting in weaners (herd A)
- Two herds with tail biting in finishers (herds B and C)
- In each herd, a cohort of 672-924 tail docked pigs was followed from weaning to slaughter/death
- Pigs were weighed individually, and the cause and date of individual medical treatments were recorded
- The association between the risk of being tail-bitten (according to the treatment data) and potential risk factors related to gender, growth and health was analysed by logistic regression analysis.

Results

Weaners (herd A): 1.9 % of the pigs (13/671) were tail-bitten.
Finishers (herds B and C): 2.3 % of the pigs (35/1526) were tail-bitten.

TABLE 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF TAIL-BITTEN AND NON-TAIL-BITTEN PIGS (RESULTS FROM LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSES)

	TAIL-BITTEN PIGS	NON-TAIL-BITTEN PIGS	P-VALUE
Weaners (herd A)			
% castrates	85%	52%	0.03
Weight at weaning (Kg)*	7.2 (1.7)	7.0 (1.6)	0.91
Age at weaning (days)	32 (3)	30 (6)	0.23
Finishers (herds B and C)			
% castrates	68%	50%	0.02
Weight at entry to finishing unit (Kg)	32 (5)	31 (5)	0.17
Age at entry to finishing unit (days)	85 (11)	81 (8)	0.002
% pigs that had received individual medical treatment as weaners	8.1%	2.8%	0.24

* Means and standard deviations.

STUDY 2: THE EFFECT OF STRAW

Background

It is not clear how straw provided in the farrowing or weaner units affects the prevalence of tail lesions in finishing pigs.

Objective

To investigate the effect of straw provided in the farrowing, weaner and finishing unit on the prevalence of tail lesions at slaughter.

Materials and Methods

- Data from 80 sow herds with associated production of finishers:
- Information about provision of straw in farrowing unit, weaner unit and finishing unit (yes/no)
 - Prevalence of tail lesions according to meat inspection data
 - The associations between straw provision and tail lesion prevalence were analysed by bivariate logistic regression analyses.

Results

- Straw provided in the finishing unit was associated with a lower prevalence of tail lesions at slaughter (OR=1.8, P=0.03)
- No effect of straw in the weaner unit was found
- Straw provided in the farrowing unit was associated with a lower prevalence of tail lesions at slaughter, but the effect could not be separated from the effect of straw in the finishing unit (in most herds with straw provision, straw was used in both units).

Conclusions

STUDY 1

Castrates were more often tail-bitten than females.

Tail-bitten finishers were on average 4 days older at entry to the finishing unit, i.e. they had had a slower growth as weaners than non-tail-bitten finishers.

STUDY 2

Straw provided in the finishing units was associated with a lower prevalence of tail lesions at slaughter.

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