

Straw use and prevention of tail biting in undocked pigs in Swedish pig farms

-a survey of housing and management routines

Stefan Gunnarsson, Beth Young and Rebecka Westin
 Dept. of Animal Environment and Health, SLU Skara, P.O. Box 234, S-532 23 Skara, Sweden
stefan.gunnarsson@slu.se

Conclusion

The Swedish farmers reported limited problems with tail biting in finishing pigs. In nurseries tail biting was rarely observed. Straw was provided to the pigs more or less daily. Distribution of straw caused no problems with then manure system in 58% of the nurseries and in 81% of the finishing units. The study is a part of FareWellDock (www.farewelldock.eu)*.

Tab. 1. "How frequently does straw cause problems (stoppages, blockages, etc) with your manure removal system?"

	Never	A few times each year	Once a month	Once a week	Daily
Nursery farms N=46	58%	31%	11%	0%	0%
Finishing farms N=43	81%	17%	2%	0%	0%

Results and discussion

Data were obtained from 60 farmers, of which 46 farms had weaners (average 1090 pig places; min 126; max 4000) and 43 farms had finishing pigs (average 1430 pig places; min 132; max 6500).

Straw was used in 58 of the 60 farms. The straw was cut or chopped in 78% of the nursery farms and in 74 % of the finishing farms.

Introduction

The background of tail biting is multifactorial and risk factors have been identified; e.g. barren environment. Tail biting is common in fattening pigs kept in fully slatted pens with no access to straw. Although tail docking was banned 2001 in EU, tail docking is often used routinely to prevent tail biting, except in Finland, Sweden and Lithuania. Fully slatted floors are banned in Sweden.

The aims of the survey were to obtain descriptive data from Swedish farmers about pig housing and management in relation to straw access and tail biting in nursery and finishing pigs. A telephone questionnaire with 108 questions about basic farm data including housing, feeding and management routines was performed in 2014.



Fig 1. In 78% of the nurseries cut or chopped straw was used.



Fig 2. Mean prevalence of tail biting in finishing pigs was 1.6 % per batch.

On average straw was distributed once a day to both weaners and finishing pigs, usually in clumps.

Straw was used in combination with other bedding material(s) in 91% of the nurseries and in 62% of the finisher farms. Straw cause no problems to the manure system in 58% of the nurseries and 81% of the finishing units (Tab. 1).

In 50% of the nursery farms tail biting was never seen, and in 39% tail biting was seen ≤ 2 times/year, in 8% 3-6 times/year and in 2% ≥ 1 times/month. Farmers with finishing pigs reported on average 1.6% tail bitten pigs per batch (min 0.1; max 6.5).

* FareWellDock is funded by the European Animal Health and Welfare ERA-net initiative (ANIHWA)