



EXPERIENCES WITH INTACT TAILS IN WELL-MANAGED CONVENTIONAL HERDS

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Background

More than 95 % of the Danish pigs are tail docked because tail docking reduces the risk of tail biting. At the Danish welfare summit meeting in March 2014, the Danish Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and delegates from the Danish agriculture and retail trade signed a declaration aimed at reducing the number of tail docked pigs in Denmark.

Objective

The objective of this pilot study was to investigate the effect of cessation of tail docking in well-managed conventional farms with a very low incidence of tail biting among tail docked pigs.

Materials and Methods

In two conventional herds, 75-90 pigs per batch were not tail docked (23 pens in herd 1 and 45 pens in herd 2). In each batch pigs with intact tails were divided into 3-5 pens (19-26 pigs per pen). Pigs with intact tails were housed under the same conditions as pigs with docked tails. In herd 1 the pigs were housed in the same pen from weaning till slaughter with solid floor in the lying area, whereas in herd 2 the pigs were housed in a weaning pen with solid floor in the lying area until 30 kg and then moved to a finisher unit with drained/ slatted floor.

If tail lesion occurred, additional enrichment was provided to stop the tail biting. The number of tail bitten pigs were counted every other week. In herd 2 pigs with intact tails were furthermore individually ear tagged and were tattooed with a separate slaughter number.

Results

The results showed a large difference in tail biting incidences between herds. Between 7-30 kg, 2.2 % of the pigs with intact tails were tail bitten in herd 1, whereas in average 8.2 % of the pigs had a tail lesion in herd 2. Between 30-60 kg, 7.8 % of the pigs in herd 1 and 20.3 % in herd 2 were tail bitten (table 1).

Tail biting was observed in 61 % of the pens in herd 1 and in 91 % of the pens in herd 2.

In herd 2 results showed that in average 51 % of the pigs with intact tails within a batch had had a tail lesion at least once between 7-85 kg.

The meat inspection data showed no difference in discarded pigs between docked and undocked pigs in herd 2. Meat inspection data did show that 5 % of the pigs with intact tails had remarks on tail lesion compared to 0.4 % among tail docked pigs from the herd.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on this pilot study, a cessation of tail docking increases the incidence of tail biting even in well-managed herds. The results suggest that even in well-managed herds in average one out of two pigs is at risk of getting a tail lesion between 7-85 kg.

Knowledge gained in this pilot study will be included in the industrial PhD-project: Tail biting – Early recognition and targeted prevention.

The PhD-project is conducted jointly by SEGES, University of Copenhagen and Scottish Rural College.

TABLE 1. AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF TAIL BITTEN PIGS PER BATCH (MIN-MAX) IN THREE WEIGHT INTERVALS. PIGS HAD INTACT TAILS.

Herds	Batches (n)	Pens (n)	7-30 kg		30-60 kg		60-85 kg	
			Ave	min – max	Ave	min – max	Ave	min – max
1	5	23	2.2	0.2 – 6.5	7.8	0 – 16	4	0 – 6.4
2	16	45	8.2	0 – 29	20.3	0 – 59	7.5	1.4 – 18

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