



NEW ZEALAND PORK INDUSTRY BOARD
Pig Welfare Research Update: WAFL Conference and Swine Innovation
Centre Visit, The Netherlands, September 2017

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Pig welfare research in Europe

Recent attendance at the WAFL Conference (Assessment of Animal Welfare At Farm and Group Level) in The Netherlands, and a visit to the Swine Innovation Centre Research facility, highlighted some current areas of research relevant to pigs in the EU. Briefly, the three key areas were:

Tail docking

Manipulable material for indoor sows

Farrowing systems



Tail Docking

The “FarewellDock” project is investigating both sides of the coin i.e. the negative welfare impacts of tail biting vs. tail docking

Aim is to phase out tail docking in EU

Currently banned in Sweden, Switzerland, Finland

Tail biting behaviour

Recent research has identified 3 types of biters:

- Two-tier biter: begins with tail sucking that develops into biting
- Frustrated/aggressive biters: Usually induced by the environment or by social factors such as when access to feeding/ lying areas becomes difficult
- Obsessive/ fanatic biters: Actively, continuously looks for tails to bite – for unknown reasons

Tail biting

Large variation between farms

Occurs in all farming systems

No such thing as a 'typical' tail biting event/ outbreak

Many risk factors e.g.

- Diet

- Inputs e.g. housing factors: design, resource access, space

- Enrichment

- Social dynamics (behaviour → genetics)

- Environmental factors (ventilation, temperature)

Much easier to prevent than stop this behaviour once it emerges



Providing manipulable material to sows indoors

Few studies have investigated the effect of providing manipulable material to sows in farrowing crates

Need alternative to straw – not practical on fully slatted systems



Hessian sacks



- ✓ Manipulable, relatively resilient, reusable (BUT hygiene issue...)
- ✓ Low risk of falling through slats – suitable for slatted floor

- ✗ Can't be used to construct a 'nest'
- ✗ Can become soiled – needs to be removed after 2 – 3 days
- ✗ Keeping them anchored can be problematic – sows tearing and eating sacks

Alternative indoor farrowing systems

- Seems to be slowing down research-wise in this area
- Many, many designs exist now – typically pen based
- Most popular pens are those with temporary crating
- Subsidies influence pen size – not science (necessarily)
- Group lactation systems are being developed – referred to as ‘multi-suckling systems’

Group lactation 'multi-suckling' systems



Group lactation 'multi-suckling' systems

- Higher piglet mortality (3.2 vs. 1.5 piglet deaths per litter)
- Piglets weaned from the group system had an 81% higher feed intake on day 1 and 2 post weaning vs piglets weaned from conventional farrowing crates
- 5 weeks post weaning, piglets from the group system had a 25% higher weight gain compared to piglets weaned from farrowing crates