

How to spot early signs of tail biting?



Injurious tail biting outbreaks are easier to control when spotted early. What are the signs that a pen needs extra attention?

Previous knowledge

The behaviour of pigs has some potential to predict an injurious tail biting outbreak. On group level, increase in general activity, restlessness and manipulation of objects, tails and/or ears of pen-mates have been observed days to weeks before injurious tail biting has emerged. Actual tail chewing may be observed several days before tail damage is evident in the group, as well as rapid tail swinging or tucking of the tail between the legs.

On individual level, gilts may be overrepresented as biters and barrows as victims for tail biting. Biters have exhibited increased levels of exploratory activity days or weeks before tail biting has begun in the group. Ill health, especially lameness, increases the risk to be tail bitten. A victim is often bitten again if injurious tail biting starts again later on, whereas the biter more often changes.

New insights from FareWellDock

Future tail bitten individuals may decrease feed intake already 2-3 weeks before tail damage is evident. Feeding behaviour in groups which develop tail biting may be different than in non-biting groups for at least ten weeks before an injurious tail biting outbreak. Tail chewing activity may start 2-3 weeks before tail damage can be seen.



Actions

Pay special attention to groups of pigs where you see:

- high or suddenly increased levels of general activity or exploration
- tail manipulation or chewing
- swinging or tucked tails
- low or decreasing numbers of visits to an automatic feeder or feed intake

Further information

Larsen, M. L. V., Andersen, H. M. L., & Pedersen, L. J. (2016). Can tail damage outbreaks in the pig be predicted by behavioural change?. *The Veterinary Journal*, 209, 50-56.

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