

Don't forget the tail!

Do you know that the tail is one of the most important Swedish trade marks? And are you aware that you can look at the tail position to learn about tail biting?

OUR STUDIES SHOW that pigs that have hanging tails at feeding are more likely to have tail lesions compared to pigs that curl their tail at feeding.

By checking the tail position (hanging or curled) at feeding you can get an idea of whether there is tail biting in the pen or not. Pigs with a hanging tail are 4-14 times more likely to have tail injuries compared to pigs with curled tails.

Often, however, these injuries are so small that they cannot be detected without close examination of the tail. Thus, we now have the opportunity to try to hinder an tail biting outbreak through provision of, for example, extra straw



What we did

Tail biting is mainly a sign of lack of occupation in pigs. Therefore, we investigated how increased straw rations affected tail damages and behaviour in pigs. The experiments were done in three grower and four different finishing pig farms. We compared tail damages and behaviour differences when the pigs got an increased straw ration (doubled compared to the normal straw ration).

Our most important results

- More straw provides the pigs with more occupation
- More straw makes the pigs interact more with the straw
- More straw makes the pigs interact less with the pen fittings
- More straw gives less tail lesions
- More straw does not lead to poor pen hygiene
- More straw does not lead to poor pig hygiene
- More straw does not lead to more manual cleaning
- Hanging tails can be a sign of tail biting

Do you want to know more? To learn more about our research and results, visit www.slu.se/hmh/knorr.

THIS BROCHURE IS PRODUCED WITH FUNDS FROM DJURSKYDDET KRONOBERG



Tail biting and straw usage in Swedish farms



SCIENCE AND
EDUCATION
**FOR
SUSTAINABLE
LIFE**

Why bedding material?

According to Swedish and EU legislation, pigs must have permanent access to bedding material to enable natural behaviour and prevent tail biting.

SWEDISH PRODUCERS commonly provide their pigs with straw. Straw is a good bedding material since straw smells good and can be eaten. The pigs are also able to play with and change form of the straw, which is important in order to maintain interest of straw over time.

Swedish producers provide growers with about 30g straw/pig/day and finishers with about 50g straw/pig/day. To fully fulfill the pigs behavioural needs, straw rations would need to be around 500g straw/pig/day.

Our studies show that increased straw rations provide the pigs with more occupation, and enables them to interact more with the straw and less with the pen fittings. Further, it decreases the amount of tail lesions.

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**TRY TO DOUBBLE YOUR STRAW RATI-
ONS, SO DID THE PRODUCERS WHO WERE PART OF OUR EXPERIMENTS**

Natural behavior

IN A NATURAL environment, the pig uses more than 60% (i.e. more than one working day) of its waking time by examining its surroundings. The purpose of this to understand and get to know the surroundings, find food, sleeping places and possible dangers.

Although pigs in production are kept in a safe environment and provided with feed and sleeping places, they still need to conduct explorative behaviour. To enable explorative behavior, we need to provide them with materials to investigate, such as straw.

Pigs that do not get to conduct explorative behaviour can redirect the behaviour and develop tail biting.



What is tail biting?

Tail biting describes one pig biting on another pigs tail, regardless if it results in visible tail damage or not. Commonly, however, we think of visible wounds when we talk about tail biting.

TAIL BITING occurs in most farms from time to time. Our studies show that tail biting has been seen in 50% of Swedish grower farms (commonly a maximum of 2 times/year) and in 88% of all finishing farms (commonly 3-12 times/year). At the slaughterhouse, a mean of 1.6% of the pigs are recorded with tail damages.

Only pigs with major injuries or partly missing tails are recorded as tail damaged at the slaughterhouse. Minor damages are not registered, but may still be a sign of deviant behaviour affecting both welfare and production. The same is true when we see tail biting in the stable; it is usually not detected until there have been major injuries. Therefore, it is important to prevent the occurrence of tail biting and deal with the outbreaks directly when they occur.

PREVENT
Provide occupation (e.g. straw)
Review the environment (e.g. draught, stocking density)

HANDLE
Identify & separate the biter
Separate bitten pig if necessary
Treat bitten pig, consider pain management

Why do pigs bite tails?

THE BIGGEST RISK FACTOR for tail biting is lack of straw, but it could also have other causes.

Two-stage tail biting: is believed to stem from unfulfilled exploratory behaviour. Often starts with mild chewing before it escalates and becomes more damaging. This type of tail biting should be possible to minimize through providing occupation, e.g. straw.

Sudden forceful tail biting: is believed to stem from competition for resources, e.g. feed. This intensive biting causes damage without being preceded by mild biting.

Compulsive biting: is described as a lot and powerful biting, but which does not depend on competition for resources but is compulsory.

TAIL BITING IMPAIR HEALTH, PRODUCTION
AND WELFARE
WHEN YOU SEE TAIL BITING; ACT!

Straw and pen hygiene?

One of the most common arguments for not providing pigs more straw is that it could affect the hygiene and cause problems in the manure handling system. Our studies show that it does not have to be so.

ALTHOUGH THE MOST common argument to not increase straw rations are that it would cause problems in the manure handling system, 60 % of the grower and 80% of the finishing producers claim that they never had issues in the manure handling system caused by straw.

Another argument is that more straw would make the pens, and thereby making the pigs, dirty. In our experiments an increased straw ration did not affect the hygiene. Only 1% of the pens were considered dirty (at least 25% of the slat was clogged or solid floor mired) regardless of straw ration. Around 1 % of the pigs were considered dirty (at least 20% of one side of the pig was dirty) regardless of straw ration. We also could not show that pens with more straw needed more manual cleaning.

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**MORE STRAW DOES NOT NECESSARILY GIVE POOR HYGIENE,
BUT INCREASED OCCUPATION AND FEWER TAIL DAMAGES**