



Tail position & tail damages

It is difficult to identify tail biting before the damages are easily detected from outside of the pen, i.e. parts of the tail are missing or there is blood visible in the pen. At this stage, it is often difficult to get the pigs to stop biting. Therefore, we need, apart from preventing tail biting outbreaks, methods to easily identify early signs of tail biting in order to hinder an outbreak. Previous studies have shown that the tail position (hanging or curled) is related to the presence of tail damages. But the conducted studies are often very time consuming, and hard to incorporate in normal farm routines. Therefore, we investigated if it was possible to relate the tail position at feeding, which could be easily incorporated in farm routines, with tail damages.

WHAT DID WE DO?

- When the pigs hear that they are about to get fed, they commonly line up along the feeding trough. So, we simply followed the feed, and stopped outside every pen and visually assessed the each pigs tail position (curled or hanging) in each pen while the pigs were feeding.
- The same day as the tail position was assessed, we also assessed each tail individually, looking for tail damages. We assessed everything from redness to lesions on the tail.
- The tail position was then compared with the presence of damages on the tail.
- The aim of the study was to investigate if the tail position is related to the presence of tail damages. Our hypothesis was that a pig with tail damage would be more prone to have a hanging tail compared to a non damage pig.

OUR MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

- Pigs that had a hanging tail had an increased risk of tail damages compared to pigs with a curled tail, although the damages detected in this study commonly were very small (and non-detectable without close examination).
- Compared to pigs with out lesions on the tails were pigs with lesions:
 - ▲ lesions 4 times more likely to have a hanging tail
 - ▲ inflamed lesions 14 times more likely to have a hanging tail
- By looking at the tail position at feeding, we were able to identify pigs with tail lesions with 78% accuracy. It means that we do not identify all pigs with lesions (or the pigs with damages less severe than lesions) and that we sometimes will falsly identify intact pigs as pigs with lesions. This method must therefore only be used as a complement to identifying tail bitten pigs, and not as the only identifier.



HOW CAN YOU USE THE RESULTS?

- 1) Make a habit out of looking at the pigs while they are fed.
- 2) Check each pen and see if you can see pigs that are feeding but that has a hanging tail instead of a curled tail.
- 3) If you identify a pen with several pigs with hanging tails, pay special attention to the fact that there may be tail biting here! To reduce the risk of tail biting, try to improve the possibility for the pigs to conduct exploratory behaviour, e.g. through provision of extra straw.