

FareWellDock



Tail docking and biting: painful consequences?

Previous scientific knowledge

Tail docking is a procedure carried out on piglets to reduce the risk of being tail bitten later in life; the shorter the remaining tail, the lower the risk of subsequent tail injury from biting. However, docking, even in very young piglets, causes acute pain and subsequent inflammation before healing takes place. For this reason, current EU legislation states that this procedure should only be carried out when no other way to prevent tail biting is effective. Very short docking may be more painful than less severe docking in the hours after the procedure, though evidence is not conclusive. Treatment using local anaesthetic can lessen pain during the docking procedure but neither this nor anti-inflammatory injection appears to abolish the pain during subsequent hours. The cut nerve ends in the tail regrow to form nerve bundles, known as neuromas, which may be associated with increased sensitivity and pain after the injury appears healed. The effect of docking length on possible long term pain is unknown.

New insights from FareWellDock

Tail docking reduces the risk of being tail bitten by fourfold.

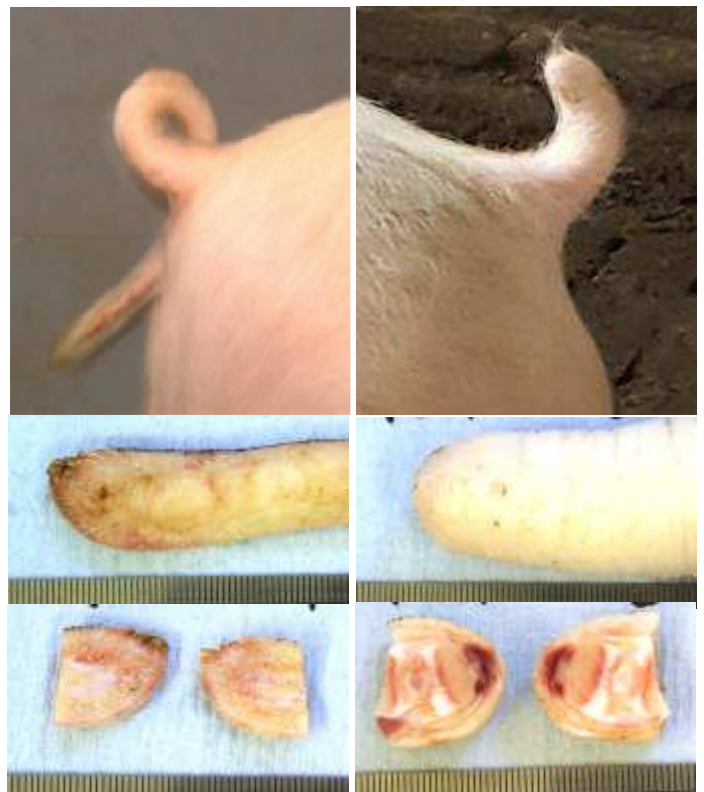
Piglets do experience pain when tail docked.

Pain relief treatment, such as meloxicam, can lessen but not abolish the physiological stress reaction to docking.

Piglets which have been tail docked seem more fearful of people afterwards than undocked animals.

In docked tails, no difference in sensitivity was detected after 8 weeks but changes in the functioning of the nerves from the tail were still measured after 4 months, which suggest the possibility that longer term pain exists.

When the tail is damaged later in life, as happens with tail biting, changes in both sensitivity and nerve functioning last for at least 4 months.



Practical implementation tips

- Avoid tail docking whenever possible because it definitely causes pain, induces long term changes in sensory nerve function and may impair the pig confidence in humans.
- Avoid tail biting and the need for tail docking by addressing risk factors on the farm.
- Treat tail-bitten pigs promptly and consider pain relief

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