

The role of health in tail biting

Preventing health problems is good for both animal welfare and economy. Could it also help you avoid injurious tail biting outbreaks?



Previous knowledge

What does science say?

Tail biting is related to health in two ways:

Firstly, tail biting victims are at risk for developing infections due to bacteria entering through wounds in the tail. Arthritis, respiratory infection and internal abscesses are all well-known consequences of tail biting. Victims of tail biting also show reduced growth. The infections and reduced growth will together lead to economic loss for producers due to reduced carcass weight and carcass downgrading. In addition, tail biting, and its detrimental effects on health, has obvious negative consequences for the welfare of the tail bitten pigs.

Secondly, bad health on the farm level may be a risk-factor for the development of an injurious tail biting outbreak. An increased risk for tail biting damage has been seen on farms with rectal prolapse and respiratory disease. Both leg disorders and respiratory inflammation has been found to be highly correlated with tail damage, but it is difficult to say which came first; the health problem or the tail biting. Thus, we need more knowledge to understand how health can contribute to a pig becoming a biter or a victim.

New insights from FareWellDock

The social behaviour of sick pigs differ from that of healthy penmates:

Pigs with osteochondrosis receive more sniffing and tail bites from their penmates than healthy pigs, while pigs with mild respiratory disease tend to bite more at the ears and tails of penmates than healthy pigs did.

Preliminary evidence suggests that low-grade inflammation may decrease activity and increase received sniffing and attacks by other pigs.



Actions

Keep your pigs healthy, this will be good both for productivity and also help you avoid injurious tail biting outbreaks.

If pigs show signs of illness, be more alert to tail biting risk.

Remove tail bitten pigs promptly to avoid further damage and treat according to veterinary advice.

Further information

FareWellDock Website: www.farewelldock.eu