



FAI Factsheet P1 - Thermal & physical comfort for pigs

At FAI we are interested in providing animals with the things that are important to them. Comfort for farm animals is often neglected but can make a big difference to their quality of life and performance. Animals are generally good at regulating their own temperature and lying areas if they have the facilities to do so.

'the facts.....'

Legislation in the UK and EU requires that accommodation for pigs must allow each pig to; 'have a clean, comfortable and adequately drained place in which it can rest;' and 'maintain a comfortable temperature.'¹

Pigs in natural environments will make a communal sleeping area in a sheltered place from grass, branches and other materials². When given a choice pigs choose to lie on bedding or earth rather than solid floors, and prefer solid floors to slatted floors.

Un-bedded solid floors or slatted floors can cause injury to pigs' legs and feet and can be slippery as well as being uncomfortable.

Pigs do not have a thick hair covering to keep them warm and cannot sweat to cool down. To keep themselves within a thermal comfort zone therefore they will make nests and huddle together when temperatures are low or will wet their skin using a water or mud wallow when hot (usually above 15C).²

Pigs will not wallow in their urine or faeces unless they are forced to because of insufficient space or as the only means of cooling down. Lying in faeces is known to affect meat quality as well as being unnatural to pigs.

Many commercial pig systems do not provide any bedding to make lying areas more comfortable and use slatted floors. In housing with high stocking densities and artificial ventilation pigs it is vital that the temperature of the building is maintained within the zone of thermal comfort for the pigs. High temperatures can cause outbreaks of aggression and tail biting amongst groups of pigs.

Straw yarded systems often do not provide wallow areas for pigs.



Wallowing on a woodchip floor

'.... the FAI response!'

In the FAI yarded systems all pigs are provided with bedding materials to reduce injuries and improve comfort. Pigs are given shelter from sun, wind and rain but ventilation is not artificially controlled, reducing the cost of housing and energy consumption.

Straw is used for bedding and lying areas are large enough for all the pigs to lie down together and generous amounts of straw are provided during the winter to make sure the pigs can keep warm by creating their own microclimate. This is not expensive as pigs do not dung in these areas.

Straw can be too warm to lie on during the summer and so woodchip is used to provide a cooler bedding material. It can also be wetted easily and used to make a wallow when temperatures are high. Pigs make their own woodchip wallows around the drinking water.

Pigs are provided with the means to control their own temperature and physical comfort and so choose the environment which best suits them.

additional information

Heat Stress in Pigs - Solving the Problem MAFF PB1316
Code of Recommendations for Welfare of Livestock - Pigs DEFRA PB7950

See factsheet P3 on environmental enrichment and P1 on reducing antibiotic use in pigs.

1. Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2003 (S.I. 2003 No.299), Schedule 6, 6
2. Stolba & Woodgush (1989) The behaviour of pigs in a semi-natural environment. *Anim. Prod.* 48, 419-25