

## Technical Data Sheet: Leaving tails on pigs

Mutilations or removing parts of animals is one of the most common issues raised by animal welfare groups. Tail docking is carried out frequently in the pig industry in order to alleviate the effects of tail biting. This does not tackle the real underlying problem which is why do pigs feel the need to bite each others tails at all?

### 'the facts.....'

In the natural state pigs spend over half of their time rooting and grazing using their snouts and mouths. They have a strong stimulus to carry out this type of behaviour and if they are kept in a 'barren' environment with no facilities for rooting then this can be redirected towards other inappropriate objects such as other pigs, especially their tails.

Tail biting commonly occurs in groups of pigs kept in commercial conditions. This causes pain and potentially disease in the bitten pigs and is an indicator that the welfare of the whole group is compromised.

To try and reduce tail biting many commercial systems use tail docking of piglets during the first few days of life. No anaesthetic is used and this causes stress and acute pain at the time and may cause longer lasting chronic pain.

The problems caused by tail docking are recognised in UK and EU law. Tail docking is only permitted when there is evidence that pigs tails are being damaged and not unless;

'other measures to improve environmental conditions or management systems have been taken in order to prevent tail biting and other vices'.<sup>1</sup> 'Other measures' in practice often constitutes objects such as chains and balls which provide only short term or no reward for the pigs in the form of feed, manipulable material or bedding. Pigs rapidly become bored with such materials and return to investigating more

interesting objects which in a barren environment is invariably another pig. Tail biting is more likely to occur when space allowances are low, when resources (eg bedding, access to food) are restricted,<sup>3</sup> in artificially ventilated housing,<sup>4</sup> or when pigs are stressed through moving pens or mixing with unfamiliar pigs.



### '.... the FAI response!'

The importance of rooting and grazing behaviour to pigs is reflected in law. It requires that; 'to enable proper investigation and manipulation activities all pigs must have permanent access to a sufficient quantity of material such as straw, hay, sawdust, mushroom compost, peat....'<sup>2</sup>

To tackle the underlying problems which cause tail biting we provide 'integral environmental enrichment' by which we mean that provisions to allow display of normal behaviours must form an integral part of the system and not an 'add on' which might be forgotten by stockmen or become boring to the pigs.

Pigs at FAI are provided with a combination of woodchip and straw which allows them to root, have a warm bed and wallow. Pigs remain in a stable group that is formed soon after birth and never mixed so that severe bullying and the stress of mixing with strange pigs is much less likely to occur. Space allowances are significantly higher than the legal minimums (2sqm for finishing pigs of 100kg liveweight) reducing stress, giving the pigs more freedom to behave normally and allowing pigs to move away from other more aggressive members of the group.

We have successfully reared all pigs with tails on for over 3 years and there has been no tail biting. This is an exciting prospect as most pigs are currently finished indoors and many outdoor pig farmers are currently docking tails. If weaners from outdoor farms were linked into more enriched indoor systems a significant proportion of pork could be produced without the need to tail dock.

Original text by Food Animal Initiative

1. Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No.299) Schedule 6, 21
2. WFAR (Amendment) 2003 (SI No.299) Schedule 6, 16
3. Moinard C et al 2003 App An Behav Sc 81:4 p333-355
4. Guise HJ & Penny RHC 1998 Veterinary Record 142:2, 46