

### European Animal Health and Welfare Panel publish Scientific Opinion on pig welfare

The European Union (EU) Animal Welfare Strategy 2011–2015 lists a number of actions to be undertaken between 2012 and 2015, one of which is the development of EU guidelines on the protection of pigs to facilitate the implementation of Council Directive 2008/120/EC (which lays down minimum standards for the protection of pigs). The European Commission (EC) therefore requested that the European Food Standards Agency (EFSA) Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) consider a range of welfare measures for pigs, with a focus on provision of manipulable material and avoidance of tail-docking.

The terms of reference provided by the EC were:

- Identify the multiple interactions between risk factors, welfare consequences and animal-based and non-animal-based measures;
- Identify the strength and predictive capacity of the above identified interactions;
- Propose a model to evaluate how likely certain welfare consequences may happen given specific risk factors and which animal and/or non-animal-based measures would better fit for the assessment of those consequences.

The AHAW Panel published a Scientific Opinion addressing the above terms of reference in May 2014 and fourteen principle conclusions and nine recommendations have been put forward.

One of the AHAW Panel conclusions is that: “Pigs have a need for manipulable materials to satisfy a range of behavioural needs, which can be different in different classes of pig”. For example, piglets in particular are affected by a total lack of manipulable material and this risk factor may result in unfavourable changes in both behavioural development and stress resistance, which may then lead to changes long-term, such as an increase in fighting and tail-biting post-weaning. If farrowing sows are not provided with manipulable material, then a welfare consequence which is likely to result is ‘frustration of motivation to build a nest’. This not only adversely affects sow welfare but also piglet

welfare (eg increased piglet mortality; reduced milk production leading to low piglet growth; and reduced colostrum intake, potentially causing increased disease occurrence).

Another conclusion was: “Analyses of a large Finnish dataset with undocked pigs showed that use of straw was associated with reduced tail-biting prevalence relative to the other types of manipulable material (including objects) present on Finnish farms. No other manipulable material gave consistent reduction in tail-biting across both weaner and rearing pigs compared to the population average”. However, the Report also discusses the importance of considering the adverse consequences of supplying manipulable material, eg in deep litter systems, straw bedding may increase the risk of heat stress due to fermentation when temperatures are above the thermo-neutral zone.

Two on-farm tool-boxes are also proposed to assess: 1) the functionality of supplied manipulable material; and 2) the presence and strength of risk factors for tail-biting. Each tool-box includes a combination of what are considered to be the most important resource-based and animal-based measures.

Amongst the recommendations, the AHAW Panel advises that the level of farmer acceptance of tail-biting is investigated and also that further studies are carried out: “to provide guidance on how to house and manage undocked pigs under different farm circumstances without uncontrollable tail-biting outbreaks”.

The Panel hopes that their findings will support the EC in their efforts to produce guidelines on Council Directive 2008/120/EC and to assist with assessing the level of compliance with legislation requirements.

**Scientific Opinion Concerning a Multifactorial Approach on the use of Animal and Non-Animal-Based Measures to Assess the Welfare of Pigs** (May 2014). A4, 101 pages. EFSA Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW). *EFSA Journal* 12(5): 3702. doi:10.2903/j.efsa.2014.3702. Available online at: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/doc/3702.pdf>.

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