

Playthings for pigs – can we do better?

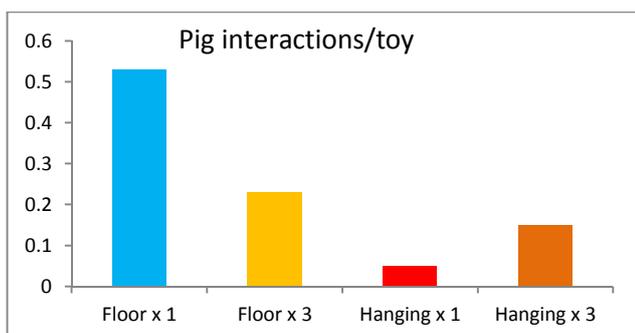
Provision of manipulable materials is a legal requirement but can be difficult to provide in fully slatted systems - where the need is often greatest. Straw provided in a rack limits the use of straw but has the potential to block slurry channels, are popular in Denmark and Germany (see below).



An interesting trial recently done by Keelin O'Driscoll at Moorepark, Ireland compared the appeal of a floor-based toy to a similar one hanging from a chain. Floor based playthings are more likely to satisfy the pigs' innate need to root and move things around with their snout than toys swinging on a chain.



The trial also assessed whether there was an effect of number of toys/pen and also used reduction in size of the toys as an indication of frequency of pig activity.



The floor-based toys reduced in size 5 times quicker than hanging toys – because the pigs were more occupied with them, this is also shown in the graph by the increased number of interactions/toy. The toys are produced by Easyfix™.

Tail biting was not a problem with these pigs generally, but it was found that when there were more toys, and of the correct type, that damage to the ears was reduced. There were no problems of the toys becoming dirty or being trapped in feeders. Overall floor toys were more attractive to the pigs than the more commonly hanging toys – the pigs actually queued up to use them

Antibiotics

living with them,
living without them

- How do we monitor and measure usage currently
- How do we monitor and measure going forward?
- How have our European counterparts coped without antibiotics?
- What are the alternatives?

The answer to these questions and more can be found at the 2015 Pig and Poultry conference on the Thursday 26th November at Sandburn Hall, Scotchman Lane, Flaxton, York YO60 7RG



It is free to have your pigs assessed on this scheme but you do need to register your farms – registration forms can be found at:

<http://pork.ahdb.org.uk/health-welfare/health/safe-traceable-pork/bphs/bphs-registration/>



Hospital pen management

The hospital pen should be a warm, dry comfortable area on the farm where ill pigs can go to recover. An individual should be removed to the hospital pen when they are unable to compete with its pen mates. A target recovery rate for pigs in the hospital pen should be 75%. When designing and managing your hospital pen the following points should be considered:

- Site away from the main accommodation
- Provide easy and plentiful access to feed and water (surface of water preferable to nipples)



- Ensure the appropriate diet for weight/age of pig
- Offer electrolytes via the water
- Pens should be well bedded, dry and free from draughts (covered kennels can be used)
- Maintain good stocking rates at LEAST 3m² for adults, 1m² for grower/finisher pigs and 0.2m² for weaners.
- Check pig health and response to treatment twice daily (RECORD all treatments clearly)
- Prompt euthanasia of chronic unresponsive cases
- Provide foot dips and hand washing facilities outside the pen
- Clean and disinfect the pens (including water line) between batches and avoid continuous flow
- Invest some time, effort and TLC
- Consider completing 'vet and med' training with Garth vets to get your certificate of competence

Topical Talk – what we are seeing....

Navel bleeding in piglets

We have been seeing a few cases of navel bleeding in piglets recently. This often occurs shortly after birth with piglets either being found dead or looking extremely pale. Factors which may predispose to navel bleeding include –

- Shavings or sawdust – This is the most common cause of navel bleeding in the UK. It is likely to be the result of resins present within certain hardwoods that are periodically and erratically included in wood based bedding materials. It is unknown whether these resins act locally on the navel (most likely) or more generally throughout the body. Replace any sawdust with either chopped straw or shredded paper.
- Damage to the cord at birth – Allow the piglet to break the cord naturally; do not move away from the sow immediately.
- Excessive trauma to the cord within 3 hours of birth. This may occur if too many piglets are fastened in the creep area.
- Prostaglandins - In some herds there appears to be association with the use of prostaglandin to synchronise farrowings. Although it is unclear if this is a direct chemical effect or the result of premature farrowing.
- Vitamin C - Ascorbic Acid fed at rate of 1.5g/sow per day for 6 days prior to farrowing may help. Some sources state max levels of up to 5g per sow per day. We recommend that you discuss this with your nutritionist.
- Vitamin K - Supplementing the sow diet with vitamin K also has some reported benefits. Again this would need to be discussed with your nutritionist.
- Warfarin poisoning can be responsible for haemorrhage – ensure sows cannot gain access to rat bait.
- Mycotoxins from contaminated feed have been implicated so check sow rations contain a mycotoxin binder.

