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Enriching Exploratory Behaviour in Pigs

What is exploratory behaviour in pigs?

- Exploratory behaviour in pigs includes the rooting, sniffing, biting, and chewing of various items in their environment.[1]

Why should you care?

- Consumers are increasingly concerned about animal welfare[2] and addressing these concerns are important for the future of pork production.[3]
- Unfulfilled exploratory behaviour can be redirected as potentially harmful behaviours directed towards pen-mates.[1] These behaviours can include increased tail-biting [4] which is a welfare problem.[3]
- Providing suitable enrichment materials to pigs meets their need to explore and reduces harmful pen-mate directed behaviours.[1]

Forms of straw enrichment:

Straw:

Straw has been shown to be an effective enrichment material.[5]

Pigs prefer mushroom compost, sand, sawdust, wood shavings, branches, beets, and silage over straw and prefer straw over ropes, rags, beams, tires, and chains. [1]

Full-length Straw:

- 👍 Induced and fulfilled exploratory behaviour.[6]
- 👍 Decreased rooting and chewing of pen-mates.[6]
- 👎 Can plug liquid slurry systems.[4]
- 👎 Pigs with prior experience of straw bit pen-mates more than pigs with no prior experience when straw was not provided later.[7]

Chopped Straw:

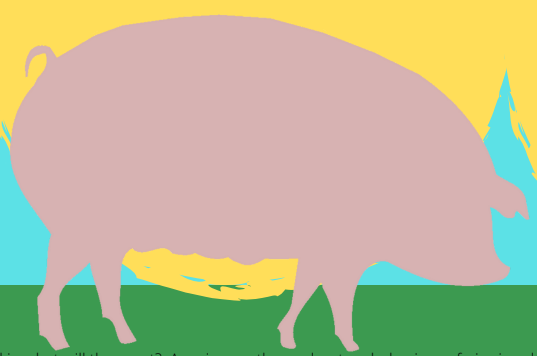
- 👍 May be a way to provide small amounts of straw in slatted systems without blocking the slurry system. [4]
- 👍 Straw of any length reduced occurrence of nosing other pigs, aggression, and tail-biting. [4]
- 👎 The physical form of chopped straw prevents pigs from picking it up and may cause frustration. [4]
- 👎 Reducing the length of straw increased tail-biting, diminishing the positive effects of straw. [4]

Straw in Racks:

- 👍 Zwicker et al. (2012) was successfully able to provide straw in racks in partially slated pens with liquid slurry systems. [8]
- 👍 Straw that fell out of the rack/s was quickly redistributed by the pigs increasing accessibility. [8]
- 👎 Decreased rack space reduced the proportion of pigs exploring and increased aggression. [8]
- 👎 Biting of pen-mates increased directly after fresh straw was added to the rack. [6]

Straw Pellets:

- 👍 Pellets cause less problems for slurry systems as they can dissolve in the manure. [5]
- 👍 The weekly rotation of six synthetically flavoured straw pellets from a material dispenser maintained high and sustained exploration levels. [5]
- 👎 Evaporation of flavours could reduce exploration durations. [5]
- 👎 Pig to material dispenser ratio may impact exploration durations. [5]



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