

Brydock Farms: Pigs with a tail to tell

Taking the lead in validating a commercial system for producing pigs with full tails.

It is now recognised that direct observation of animal behaviour can provide a more robust assessment of welfare than defining input measures alone. In light of this development, the recently completed EU-funded Welfare Quality project (www.welfarequality.net) produced a set of welfare criteria focusing on farm animals. Covering everything from diet to hygiene standards, the criteria also stated that animals 'should be able to express normal, non-harmful species specific behaviours'. For pigs, rooting is a prime example of such behaviours.

According to research¹, in a natural environment pigs spend approximately 60% of their waking time rooting. However, without sufficient

manipulable material, such as straw or woodchip, they can develop harmful behaviours including tail biting. Tail biting causes pain and can also lead to extreme damage, infection and in the worse cases, death. Therefore an intact tail tells us that a good environment has been provided for the pig throughout life.

Routine tail docking is prohibited under EU legislation, yet most pigs in standard commercial systems currently still have their tails docked. However, Brydock Farms have demonstrated that within a scalable, commercial system, routine tail docking is unnecessary and avoidance of tail biting is consistently achievable. Please read on for more information on method, benefits and validation.

Typical outdoor unit from which weaners are produced



The Brydock system

Brydock Farms, based in Aberdeenshire, has been breeding and finishing pigs with tails on for ten years. Piglets are born on Brydock-owned farms then moved out on to family farms after weaning. Pig suppliers to parent company Vion UK, Brydock currently produces 4,000 finished pigs per week. Of these, 1,000 pigs have full tails.

This high number of full tails has been achieved thanks to a system that provides a constant supply of manipulable material and enough space to perform natural behaviours, thereby

reducing the risk of tail biting.

The system was developed by the team at Brydock and was introduced to meet the aspirations of customers. It meets all mandatory requirements for the avoidance of tail biting as outlined in the MAD (mandatory, advisable, desirable) Input System, developed by the Food Animal Initiative (FAI) in partnership with the RSPCA and UK agricultural colleges.

For details on how the mandatory requirements have been met by Brydock, please see the table on the next page.

Mandatory requirements for the avoidance of tail biting	Achieved at Brydock by:
Constant supply of manipulable material	Fresh straw in pens at all times
Sex segregation	Pigs sexed at weaning
Constant provision and no competition for water (water clean at all times)	Robust 'company developed' water system with one drinker space per 10 pigs
Constant provision and no competition for food (7 pigs or less per feeding space)	Gravity fed, large hopper feeding systems which have very low risk of running out or blocking
Stocking density	0.62m ² per weaner, 1.5m ² per finisher
Good ventilation and air quality	Large air volume, draught-free farm buildings
Maintenance of peer groups	Pigs maintained in groups from weaning
Good light quality	Buildings with access to daylight
The ability to thermoregulate (particularly pigs over 30kg)	Wet area around drinkers to allow wallowing and micro climate thermal comfort in straw bedding including full straw bales for weaners
Good herd health status	Herd health plan implementation via fieldsman
Provision of roughage for gut health	Fresh straw available at all times

Mandatory requirements as met by the Brydock Farms system.

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Validation

A total of 18 farms using the Brydock system were visited by the RSPCA, Compassion in World Farming, FAI and animal welfare scientists over a period of four months. More than 11,000 pigs in 75 pens were observed using the Husbandry Advisory Tool (HAT) as devised by Bristol University and Newcastle University (please see www.vetschool.bris.ac.uk/webhat).

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Further information

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