

S19.5 How to assess positive emotions in pigs

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Good welfare of farm animals is in the interest of farmers, society and animal welfare scientists. Good welfare means, among other things, the experience of positive emotions. The question is how do we know whether an animal is experiencing positive emotions? Emotions are considered to be composed of behavioural, (neuro)physiological, cognitive and conscious components. The last component has not been proven to exist in animals yet. The other components, however, can and have been used to assess emotions in animals.

We investigated the behavioural component, because this is the most convenient one to use on farms. Experiments with pigs confirmed that play behaviour and bark vocalizations are behavioural indicators of positive emotions, and tail wagging could be a possible new indicator of positive affect in pigs. In addition, we also found that play can lead to play in other pigs, thereby likely spreading the positive emotional state, a process called emotional contagion. This could lead to better welfare for the whole group and not only the individual animal. Moreover, nosing behaviours also seem to play a role in good welfare.