

CURLY TAILS: THE DUTCH APPROACH

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Despite EU legislation and societal concerns, in current pig farming, most piglets are still tail docked. The pig farming sector would prefer to stop tail docking. However, without additional preventive measures, tail biting will likely increase. Several Dutch parties have designed the Declaration of Daltsen, containing a careful road map towards curly tails. This map comprises a demonstration project, development of a toolbox and knowledge exchange, and aims at closing the gap between science and practice and relieving the anxiety and scepticism about keeping pigs with long tails in current systems. In 2014, every six weeks a batch of twelve undocked litters was included in the demonstration. Circumstances were optimized as much as possible, and additional enrichment was provided. Caretakers were coached to recognize early signs of animals at risk. Nonetheless, tail damage appeared. Mostly in individual animals, but occasionally as an outbreak at pen level (for which predictive correlates are searched). Remarkably, at three weeks of age, several piglets already showed bite marks at the tail. Attitudes of the caretakers changed during the year to a higher level of alertness and an active approach towards required management changes. A traffic light system was implemented to safeguard attention towards groups at risk. The use of some enrichment materials encountered practical problems, and labour required for adequate monitoring and providing materials was higher than expected. The toolbox is still being developed and tested, describing effective curative measures. A network of farmers keeping pigs with long tails was formed, to support exchange of knowledge and experiences. All knowledge gained will feed an educational programme for pig farmers and farm advisors to enable a responsible transition towards longer tails. The key to success of this approach is that pig farmers are at the steering wheel, with guidance from actors in the chain.