

Question to EURCAW-Pigs

Question

“What manipulable materials would be best adapted for animals kept alone (e.g.: sows before and after parturition, males) considering the price and feasibility for a farmer?”

EURCAW’s response

Prof. Lene Juul Pedersen, Aarhus University (Denmark) wrote the initial reply. The EURCAW secretariat did the final editing. For queries: info.pigs@eurcaw.eu.

Answer

For sows kept in crates before parturition manipulable materials that can be implemented and still have some value for the sow are e.g. hanging sisal rope and hanging soft fresh branches, jute sacks attached to the bars or compressed straw delivered into the trough. These materials belong to the category “suboptimal materials” according to the Commission Staff working document.

For males kept in individual pens: If part of the floor is solid, straw or similar materials provided on the solid floor to root and manipulate will be an optimal solution, due to higher value for the animals. If the flooring lacks sufficient solid surface other materials can be used which are slightly less optimal. Straw or even higher valued materials as hay and roughage provided in a rack can be used for males kept in a pen.

Practical consequences

The suggested solutions for crated sows can be attached to the bars or delivered into the trough. Delivering materials on the floor will easily get out of reach for the sow and therefore have no value or even worsen the situation for the sow. Piglets also need to get enrichment to meet their need to perform exploratory behaviour. Providing enrichment for the piglets pre-weaning may be important for reducing risk of tail biting post- weaning. The suggested hanging object can be of value also for the pigs if the height is adjusted accordingly. Shredded paper positioned on the floor can supplement the hanging rope as enrichment for the piglets.

The price of the suggested materials are low, and the same is the work load related to providing the materials.

Relevant references

Telkänranta, H., Swan, K., Hirvonen, H., & Valros, A. (2014). Chewable materials before weaning reduce tail biting in growing pigs. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 157, 14-22. DOI: 10.1016/j.applanim.2014.01.004