

Experiences with the protocol in 5 partner countries

In each of the 5 partner countries we asked 2-3 farmers to register early signs of tail biting according to a standard protocol during November and December 2016. The protocol was developed in close cooperation with groups of farmers. The observations were focused on tail posture, unusual activity and tail biting. The scores were given each day on pen level in a selection of rooms. The aim was to detect tail biting in its earliest stage and collect feedback from the farmers about the protocol and if it changed their daily inspection. The results will be described by country, summarized and followed by joint conclusions.

Switzerland

In Switzerland three farmers were involved keeping their pigs with intact tails. They did not suffer from tail biting in their pigs. One of the farmers stopped recording because he had no problems with tail biting after making improvements. Another one already checked the animals several times per day. They concluded that filling in the table is a lot of extra work if there is no tail biting, but that the protocol might be helpful in situations with tail biting. The additional time for the protocol should be reduced to just recording the deviations and not recording the situations with "zeros".

France

In France two farmers were involved. One farmer had 3 batches of pigs (300) with docked tails and 1 batch (100) with intact tails. Tail biting occurred in most of the pens, often preceded by changes in tail posture.

Score 2 for tail posture occurs before score 2 for tail lesion in 4 out of 5 pens. Score 2 for behaviour does not seem related to score 2 for tail lesion. Agitation seems unrelated to tail lesion. Tail posture with score 2 seems to precede, or at least accompany, tail lesion with score 2.

Denmark

In Denmark two farmers were involved. One farmer starts with groups of 600 and splits them in two groups after some weeks. He used the protocol daily since December, but writes down his observations now and then. He likes to have an additional column for more notes. Especially the tail posture is valuable in his opinion.

The second farmer started in January and has experiences over a shorter period of time. He had a positive attitude finds it fine to use and does not use much time on it. His adviser used it when she visited him to discuss tail biting. His assistant is filling it in every day. The protocol has helped them putting more focus on tail biting than before and in this way changed his way of observing the pigs. They have had tail bites in one pen and that developed very fast.

Germany

In Germany three farmers were involved.

One farmer said that it worked out well and thinks that especially "tail hanging" is a good indicator. Another farmer said, that he filled out the protocols but not the whole time and didn't return the form so far. The third farmer said that filling out the protocol is a big effort. His later observations were less detailed. He also said that "hanging tails" is a good indicator. As he looked more intensively to this he could see that changes happen very quickly: in the morning he noticed 2-3 pigs with hanging tails, at midday half of the pigs had hanging tails and when he looked again in the late afternoon more than ¾ of the pigs had hanging tails with just 2-3 pigs that had their tails still curled up

Netherlands

In the Netherlands 3 farmers were involved keeping pigs with intact tails, but only 2 did the registration. On the first farm the protocol was tested in 4 rooms with 4 pens each and 20-25 pigs per pen, 375 pigs in total. On the second farm the protocol was also tested in 4 rooms, with 2 pens each and 20-60 pigs per pen, 332 pigs in total. Both farmers experienced most problems with tail biting in October and it died away in November and December. There was a tendency that hanging tails appeared simultaneously or slightly before real tail biting. A change in activity (agitation) was not observed prior to tail biting. The farmers completed the 2 month recording period, but it did not change their present way of inspection.

Overall

Twelve pig farmers registered early signals for tail biting on a daily basis. Tail posture mostly showed a parallel development with tail biting and sometimes precedes tail biting. Activity (agitation) is not regarded as a useful indicator by the farmers.

They all liked to have additional space on the form to write down their own observations and curative measures.



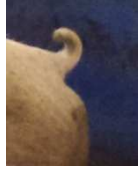














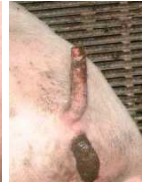
All farmers indicated that the forms with the protocol costs extra work. Just scoring deviations on room level is acceptable.

Conclusions

- Tail posture is a good indicator of tail biting, but not always preceding tail biting;
- Signs on the tail itself (wet, scratches, blood) are the best indicators of tail biting;
- Activity (agitation) is not a good indicator of tail biting;
- Writing down "zeros" means extra work and could be omitted; just scoring deviations is acceptable
- Registering on room level might be more suitable than registering on pen level.
- Pig farmers consider filling in the score sheets as extra work. For a protocol to be successful, they need to be convinced that the benefits outweigh the costs.

Example of 5 days hanging tail preceding tail biting in pen 2,

		hok 1 <i>RV</i>			hok 2 <i>16</i>		
GEM GEW start waarn en AANTAL per hok		23			28		
datum	uur	staart hangt	onrustig	staart wond	staart hangt	onrustig	staart wond
17	11.30	X 24	-	-	X 24	-	-
18	16.00	-	-	-	X 2	-	-
19	13.00	X 2	-	-	X 3	-	-
20	16.00	X 2	-	-	X 3	-	-
21	11.45	X 2	-	-	X 1	-	-
22	13.30	X 2	-	-	X 2	-	X
23	11.00	-	-	-	-	-	X
24	11.30	-	-	-	-	-	X

<u>EN</u>	score		Watch
tail down	-	All tails up and/or curly	   
	X	At least one of the tails hangs down	 
	XX	At least one of the tails is (presumed to be) tucked in	 
agitation	-	All animals are calm, but might be standing as long as it is "positive" activity	
	X	At least one animal is noticeably more restless/nervous/manipulative/aggressive than normal (normal is the level of the previous observation days)	
	XX	At least one of the pigs is much more restless/nervous/manipulative/aggressive than normal (normal is the level of the previous observation days)	 
tail lesion	-	No lesions	
	X	At least one animal has light lesions (scratches)	 
	XX	At least one animal has severe lesions	  



“Eye of the Farmer Protocol” version February 2017 (See PigWatch_FFG_Checklist FINAL V2 170301.xlsx)

Version 2: Columns "Agitation" removed; Wider column for Remarks; Number of pens to be adjusted
 Suggestion to limit administration time: Only write "real scores" and no "zeros"

room no.:		Month										(country-farmname/code)	
Estimated average LW at start		pen 1	pen 2	pen 3	pen 4	pen 5	pen 6	pen 7	pen 8	pen 9	pen 10	REMARKS	
date	hour	tail down	tail lesion	tail down	tail lesion	tail down	tail lesion	tail down	tail lesion	tail down	tail lesion	tail down	tail lesion
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
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We always report the worst category, and then present the number of pigs in the pen which it relates to.

level		
look out for	X	
tail down	All tails up and/or at least one of the tails hangs down	
tail lesion	No lesions	At least one animal has light lesions

LW = live weight