

## Tail injuries

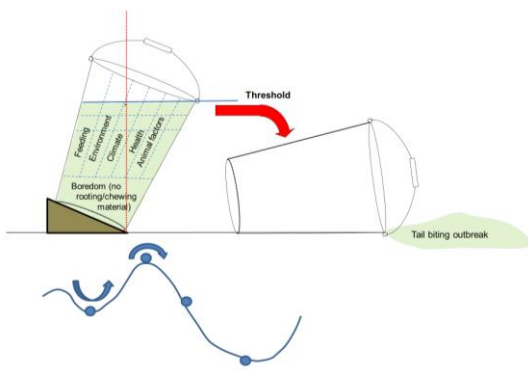


© WUR

### Origin of tail injuries

- Tail injuries result from **tail biting**, which is an abnormal behaviour, involving pigs biting other penmates' tails;
- It is a response to boredom, insufficient stimulation, and frustration related to several negative environmental and management factors that can increase pigs' stress levels;
- Tail biting is therefore a multi-factorial problem, filling up a 'cumulative risk bucket'. At a certain point, the bucket overflows, and tail biting starts:

#### 'CUMULATIVE RISK BUCKET'



The main (six) risk factors that go in the bucket are:

- Inadequate environmental enrichment;

Inadequacies in other management measures:

- Thermal comfort and air quality
- Health status;
- Competition for resources;
- Diet;
- Pen structure and cleanliness.



### Legal requirements



Council Directive **2008/120/EC** states in Annex 1, Chapter I, point 8 "Neither tail-docking nor reduction of corner teeth must be carried out routinely but only where there is evidence that injuries to sows' teats or to other pigs' ears or tails have occurred. Before carrying out these procedures, other measures shall be taken to prevent tail biting and other vices, taking into account environment and stocking densities. For this reason inadequate environmental conditions or management systems must be changed."

*Note: Listed requirements are not comprehensive. Moreover, there might be stricter national legislation in place.*

### Inspection method (recommended)

- Farmer records injuries in the animal unit during daily inspections. It should be recorded as part of the documentation of the farmer's risk assessment in relation to tail docking;
- Inspector verifies records of the farmer by comparing written/digital documentation with interventions taken by farmer in the farm;
- Additionally, the inspector checks pigs of different age groups and from different pens/groups for tail injuries;
- Inspector reports findings to farmer and in case of discrepancies between legal requirements and situation on farm corrective actions are taken.

**Next page: Tails are either scored as intact, or having minor/major wounds.**

#### Comparison of farms

On top 20% of farms pigs do not show tail biting, whereas this is between 5.9 and 23.2% on bottom 20% of farms (Welfare Quality© and AssureWel).

# Tail injuries

Pigs are scored individually according to the proportion of damage to the tail.  
Tail injury score at farm level: percentage of pigs having tails with wounds.

## Intact tails

No sign of damage: it is not wounded nor shortened. The tail is curled and the tail tip is flat and has bristles



## Minor wound

Damage through the skin of at least 0.5 cm in diameter but not greater than 2.0 cm i.e. a wound not bigger than the size of a ten cent (euro) coin. The wound should have fresh blood (a fresh wound), a scab (a recent but healing wound) or both. Anything less than 0.5 cm is not scored



## Major wound

Damage through the skin of at least 2.0 cm in diameter (size of a ten cent euro coin) or more than one minor wound (see previous definition). The wound should have fresh blood (a fresh wound), a scab (a recent but healing wound) or both



Source scoring protocol: EU Platform on Animal Welfare, Subgroup Pigs, 2019



Co-funded by  
the European Union



WAGENINGEN  
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH



AARHUS  
UNIVERSITY

FRIEDRICH-LOEFFLER-INSTITUT



Bundesforschungsinstitut für Tiergesundheit  
Federal Research Institute for Animal Health



European Reference Centre  
for Animal Welfare *Pigs*

For any questions or  
concerns regarding this  
factsheet please contact  
the Centre