




Skin lesions

Mixing of unfamiliar animals, Competition for resources



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What do skin lesions indicate?

- In commercial production, group-housed sows are mixed at least once in each reproduction cycle with unfamiliar sows.
- In addition, simultaneously access to resources as e.g. space, feed, water and enrichment material is often limited. 
- Establishing a social relationship with unfamiliar sows and competition for resources (feed, water, lying space) often involves aggression, resulting in skin lesions.

Legal requirements



Council Directive (EC) **No 2008/120**: Requirements associated with mixing with unfamiliar animals and competition for resources:
{Annex I, Chapter II, Point B.1.}: minimising aggression in groups.
{Article 3, Point 8.}: individual pens for group-housed pigs that have been attacked by others.
{Article 3, Point 1.b} provision of total unobstructed floor area available.
{Article 3, Point 4.}: pen sides greater than 2.8 m in length.
{Annex I, Chapter I, Point 6.}: provision of simultaneously access to food, when not fed ad libitum or individually by an automatic system.
{Article 3, Point 6.}: avoidance of competitive feeding and ensuring sufficient food intake for each individual.
{Annex I, Chapter I, Point 7.}: permanent access to a sufficient quantity of fresh water.

Note: Listed legal requirements are paraphrasing the literal text of the regulation and are not comprehensive. Moreover, there might be stricter national legislation in place. For a more detailed description on the specific requirements, see the review "[Group housing and mixing of sows](#)".



Inspection method (recommended)

- The farmer records **skin lesions** in the animal unit during his/her daily inspections. Especially during the first week after mixing he needs to monitor the process of hierarchy formation, e.g. by checking severe lesions.
- The official inspector verifies records of the farmer and relates them to written documentation and interventions taken on the farm.
- Additionally, the inspector checks sows of different age groups and from different pens/groups for skin lesions.
- The inspector reports findings to the farmer and in case of discrepancies between legal requirements and situation on farm corrective actions are taken.

Location of skin lesions on the pigs' bodies

In case lesions are predominantly found on the front half this indicates that skin lesions are mainly due to fighting, occurring when establishing a social relationship. In case lesions are predominantly found on the rear half, this indicates that aggression was mainly due to competition for (limited) resources.

If the majority of pigs shows skin lesions, identify any noticeable pattern in the pen, i.e. lesions on front or rear half.



Assessment of skin lesions to identify competition over limited resources is not so useful within the first week following mixing. Monitoring of aggression due to competition can best take place in a group with an established dominance rank order.

Pigs are scored individually for having skin lesions. Definition of lesion includes broken skin, fresh (i.e. bleeding) wounds and healing lesions (scabs). Scar tissue is not included. Stand near the animal and visually assess one side only. Divide the pig's body into two halves and score each half separately:

- Front half (= Ears and head, shoulders, front legs).
- Rear half (= Flank, hindquarters, back legs).

No or low risk to welfare: No lesions or mild lesions

- ✓ A linear lesion with ≥ 10 cm length;
- ✓ Or 3 or more lesions with ≥ 3 cm length but lesions in total cover $< 25\%$ of the skin;
- ✓ Or a circular area less than 2.5 cm diameter.



High risk to welfare: Severe lesions

- ✓ A circular lesion ≥ 2.5 cm diameter;
- ✓ Or a lesion that extends into the deeper layers of the skin;
- ✓ Or lesions that cover $\geq 25\%$ percentage of the skin independent of lesion length.



Source for the assessment method: [AssureWel protocol](#)



EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare Pigs

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding this factsheet please contact info.pigs@eurcaw.eu