

Title: Benchmarking tail length and lesions at slaughter. Welfare at slaughter

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Around 98% of the pigs' tails in the Netherlands are docked within the first week of life. Docking is used to decrease the risk of tail biting. Routine-based docking is prohibited by law and there has been increased pressure on EU-level to completely stop docking, as is the case in Finland and Sweden.

Around half of all pigs in the Netherlands are kept under normal conditions, slightly less than half is kept under a higher welfare scheme (BLK) and a couple percent is kept under two- or three star welfare schemes (BLK** and BLK***). When pigs are kept under normal conditions, (not in welfare schemes), usually a few centimeters of tail remain at slaughter.

The focus of this project is to establish a benchmark of tail length and lesion score at slaughter and to provide a protocol to repeat these measurements over time. To collect these values, an action cam (GoPro HERO8) was used to record videos of tails at the slaughterline. These videos were collected at three slaughterhouses. A figure of a 'reference tail' is displayed next to the carcass on the video images of the slaughterline and visually scored at the office.

The videos were recorded at three slaughterhouse locations, over a period of 12 months (Oct-2021 – Oct 2022). These videos were recorded for 2 hours at a time, with 36.000 carcasses planned divided over 3 welfare concepts. The tail length is scored on a 5 classes scale and tail lesions are scored on a 3 classes scale. So far (June 2022) half of the total number of carcasses haven't been scored, all slaughterhouses combined. The results will be available in the end of 2022.

The process is repeated to see progress in non-docking and to develop an automatic scoring system on an European level with an uniform scoring protocol. Current scoring systems and protocols often work on a national level and should be further developed to one general European method.