

SCIENCE TEXTS

Short Written Texts (Government Publications)

National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). *Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare 2010*. NZ Government (2010). *Extract from section 5 – Behaviour* (p. 17).



5. Behaviour

Introduction

Meeting a pig's behavioural needs is important for its welfare. Pigs are social animals and prefer to live in groups. At all ages they are very vocal and when given the opportunity will display behaviours such as rooting, nest building, chewing and other forms of oral and nasal stimulation. It is important that pigs are given social contact as well as freedom and choice of movement, so they can express behaviours that are important to them.

While domestication has made pigs easier to handle, some undesirable behavioural traits persist that may need to be managed to ensure pig welfare. These problems occur in all production systems but may require additional attention indoors where there are higher stocking densities. Pigs are hierarchical animals and will seek to establish a social structure which may result in aggression, particularly when mixing unfamiliar pigs. Where pigs of all ages are kept in groups, aggression can create welfare problems, which may be severe if they are not well managed. Aggression can also occur at feeding times and is manifested by bullying, fighting and vices such as vulva, tail or ear biting. It is essential to be alert for these behaviours both to manage them and to identify and minimise the factors that cause them. Aggression can be mitigated by a variety of practices, and a high standard of stockmanship is essential.

Dry sow stalls are employed to manage aggressive behaviour of sows but, in doing so they limit sows' ability to express some other behaviours. One of the purposes of this section of the code is to establish a clear direction towards housing systems which provide pigs with the opportunity to engage in a greater range of behaviours while maintaining physical and health needs.

The minimum standards and associated indicators outlined elsewhere in this code also address the behavioural needs of pigs and provide advice on how these needs can be met.

Minimum Standard No. 9 – Behaviour

- (a) Pigs must be managed in a manner that provides them sufficient opportunities to express and satisfy their normal behaviours. These include, but are not limited to, feeding, drinking, sleeping, dunging and urination, vocalisation, thermoregulation, and social contact.

Example indicators for Minimum Standard No. 9 – Behaviour

- Pigs are alert and attentive
- Pigs are monitored for signs of stereotypic behaviour and vocalisation, and remedial action is taken as necessary
- Pigs are monitored for aggression, tail, ear and vulva biting, and remedial action is taken as necessary
- Less than 15% of pigs have skin lesions, bites and scratches from fighting at any one time

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Recommended Best Practice

- (a) Rooting material such as straw, or other material that can be manipulated, should be provided for all pigs.
- (b) Pigs with serious ear, vulva or tail bite wounds should be immediately separated from pen mates, where practicable, and treated if necessary. If the pig responsible for biting can be identified, it should be moved to an individual pen.
- (c) Genetic selection methods should be encouraged as a means to promote behavioural traits that minimise welfare problems in pigs.
- (d) Where undesirable behaviours are detected, management, housing and equipment design, and environmental conditions should be reviewed to identify and reduce or remove the cause.
- (e) Facilities in which pigs are group housed but are individually fed, i.e. either at individual feeding stations or via a computerised feeding system, should be monitored to reduce aggression at feeding times.
- (f) Every effort should be made to minimise mixing of unfamiliar pigs. When pigs are destined for slaughter and mixing is inevitable, they should be mixed at the time of loading onto the vehicle rather than before.
- (g) Environmental enrichment should be provided for housed pigs. Such practices may include:
 - the provision of “toys” such as a length of hanging chain, rock, tyre, buoy or “football”
 - positive human contact (such as pats, rubs and talking)
 - the use of a radio in growing sheds to accustom pigs to a range of noises and voices

General Information

Social contact is provided for pigs by physical contact in groups or between pigs housed next to each other, and by keeping pigs within hearing and sight of each other. When pigs are kept in groups, aggression can be mitigated through a variety of practices such as attention to group size and composition, adequate space, feeding method, diet and the satisfaction of appetite, selection for temperament, running a boar with pregnant sows, provision of straw or other bedding to encourage foraging behaviour, individual feeding stalls, individual pens or using baffles such as bales of straw to create escape areas where pigs can withdraw.

Techniques used to minimise aggression when mixing unfamiliar pigs include introducing pigs into a pen that has feed on the floor, introducing all of the pigs into a new pen at the same time, using group sizes of more than 50 pigs and using a pen with room for the pigs to move away, or with baffles such as bales of straw that pigs can hide behind.

5.1 Managing Interactions between Sows and Piglets

Introduction

Sows' behaviour during and after farrowing can be a hazard for their piglets. They can crush the piglets as they lie down and may also kill and eat piglets.

The purpose of any farrowing facility is to provide the piglets with an area where they have ready access to the sow, where they can maintain body temperature and where they can avoid being crushed by the sow. The facility needs to also provide for the welfare needs of the sow. Meeting the needs of piglets can conflict with the needs of the sow, so systems used to manage farrowing sows and suckling piglets have to balance their differing requirements.

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In outdoor production, an ark is the farrowing facility. The most common indoor facility is the farrowing crate. Both have the objective of ensuring the highest practicable survival of piglets. Farrowing crates also aid with fostering piglets between sows, a process which protects the welfare of smaller piglets or excess piglets from large litters where there are more piglets than the sow can feed adequately. Crates also provide the advantages of enabling individual feeding and health care. The disadvantages of farrowing crates for the sow include the restriction of movement and a reduced ability to carry out nest building behaviours.

As stated in the 2005 code of welfare, NAWAC wants to see indoor housing systems shift progressively to those in which the lactating sow and piglets have the benefits conferred by farrowing crates while giving the sow increased opportunity to move and express a greater range of behaviours, including nest building. NAWAC strongly encourages the industry to identify and adopt such systems as soon as possible.

Minimum Standard No. 10 – Managing Interactions between Sows and Piglets

- (a) Accommodation for farrowing and lactating sows must be of suitable design and sufficient size to allow the sow to lie down at full length and without leg restriction.
- (b) Support, such as barriers or sloping walls to lean against, must be provided for the sow as she lies down, and she must be able to rise and stand comfortably without undue risk of injury to her litter.
- (c) When standing in a farrowing crate the sow must not touch both sides of the crate simultaneously, and her back must not touch any bars along the top.
- (d) The farrowing system must provide an area to which the piglets can retreat when the sow moves.
- (e) If sows are to be confined in farrowing crates before farrowing, it must be for no more than five days.
- (f) If sows are to be confined in farrowing crates for lactation, it must be for no more than four weeks after farrowing.
- (g) Notwithstanding (f), nurse sows may be retained in a farrowing crate for a further week for fostering purposes. This is conditional on no more than 5% of sows in any herd at any one time being retained as nurse sows.
- (h) Sows, in any farrowing system constructed after 3 December 2010, must be provided with material that can be manipulated until farrowing.

Note:

Section 73(3) of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 provides that the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) may, in exceptional circumstances, recommend minimum standards that do not fully meet the obligations to ensure that the physical, health and behavioural needs of the animal are met. In making this recommendation NAWAC must have regard to, among other things, the feasibility and practicality of effecting a transition from current practices and any adverse effects that may result from such a transition, and the economic effects of any transition from current practices to new practices.

NAWAC considers that the confining of sows in farrowing crates for extended periods does not fully meet the obligations of the Act. Minimum Standards 10 (e) and (f) restrict the time sows are confined in farrowing crates to a maximum of five weeks in any reproductive cycle.

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Example indicators for Minimum Standard No. 10 – Managing Interactions between Sows and Piglets

- There is an unobstructed area behind the sow when farrowing
- All piglet mortality and causes are monitored, recorded and remedial action taken as necessary
- Piglets are able to move to an area where they are safe from being crushed
- Sows can lie down at full length and without leg restriction, and rise and stand comfortably
- The configuration of the sides of the farrowing crate or ark provide support for the sow as she lies down
- There is space for the sow to suckle all piglets together at the same time and space is available on the narrowest side of the crate to allow piglets to escape
- The floor in the piglet area has a solid surface or is covered with a mat, or is littered with straw or another suitable material
- Hygiene standards ensure adequate dung and urine removal so the nest area is kept clean
- Manipulable material, e.g. straw, is provided to sows from the time they enter the farrowing system until the time of farrowing, in all farrowing systems constructed after 3 December 2010

Recommended Best Practice

- (a) Sows should be introduced to clean farrowing quarters three to five days before the piglets are due to be born.
- (b) Sows should be provided with nest building material e.g. straw from at least 48 hours before farrowing.
- (c) Sows should not be kept in farrowing crates for more than 10 days after farrowing.
- (d) Sows in farrowing pens should have free access to separate feeding, dunging and lying/nesting areas.
- (e) New-born piglets, born in outdoor systems, should be confined to the farrowing ark for the first week after birth.

General Information

Most piglet mortality occurs within the first four days after farrowing. After that time the piglets become more active and are better able to get out of the sow's way.

There are many farrowing crate designs in use. The most common have bowed or finger rails and slatted flooring. Adjustable crates are encouraged. Some older farrowing crate designs are no longer suitable for larger modern sows and do not meet the minimum standards in this code.

Alternative systems to farrowing crates include outdoor huts, deep-litter group lactation and farrowing pens. There are a large variety of farrowing pen designs in use and being further developed, internationally. These often have separate sow and piglet areas, and there is a growing interest in designs that allow the piglets to stay in a nest area where nursing occurs and allow the sow to leave for other activities.