

Novelty in Enrichment Material

Point of production: Finishing

Country of origin: Spain



European legislation emphasises that pigs must have manipulable materials available to satisfy the behavioural need for investigation. The more complex the environment, the more activities that may be performed by the animal. If the environment is poor, exploration and oral activities can be redirected to other pigs, or equipment within the pen. Appropriate enrichment is one of the factors decreasing the risk of tail biting. Providing suitable enrichment material for pigs is therefore of significant welfare importance to the herd.

The solution - Best practice

Rosa Colomex from Catalonia houses 616 finishing pigs. A system has been designed to promote a sense of novelty for the pigs by changing the type of enrichment in each pen every day in order to sustain interest in the enrichment.

How: A chain-based rotary system attached to the roof moves hanging enrichment from one pen to another. Enrichment materials include pieces of wood, balls, straw containers, plastic rings and hemp ropes.

An extra pen called 'the playroom' has also been introduced, to which the pigs are moved once a week with a combination of different materials in the same room, along with another area with deep straw to root in, to which pigs are also moved at regular intervals. The range of enrichments varies depending on the age range of the pigs.

Cleaning: Enrichment material is cleaned every time a new batch of fattening pigs goes into the shed. All materials are removed and kept in a large bucket of detergent for a day. Any remaining dirt on the materials is removed. Once the whole farm is empty and cleaned, the enrichment is hung up again and disinfected in place.

Points to consider and additional information

Incidence of tail biting is less than 1%, with most pigs arriving on the farm at 8 to 10 weeks old, having already been tail docked. Prices are two to three times higher than conventional farms as they produce to particular standards under a quality label, 'Porc Ral Avinyo'. The better prices more than cover the cost of production of Porc Ral d'Avinyo farms - which is 13% higher than for conventional pork.

Comparing like for like, the unit's total costs are 1.3% lower per kg hot slaughter weight than the typical Porc Ral d'Avinyo unit (€ 1.52/kg vs € 1.54/kg). The variable costs per kg slaughter weight were 5% lower for this unit, while the fixed costs were 23% higher.



Chain system moves enrichment from pen to pen



Different enrichment types hang from chain system

Cost/Benefit analysis

Benefits:

- ✓ The average mortality on this farm is 1% compared with an average of 2.2% for similar finishing farms producing for Porc Ral d'Avinyo (the average for a commercial farm in Spain is 3.6%)
- ✓ Finishing daily liveweight gain is 788g/day which is higher than on other Porc Ral d'Avinyo farms (it is 701g/day on an average Spanish farm)
- ✓ The feed conversion ratio is, on average, 0.26% better compared to the other farms supplying Porc Ral d'Avinyo
- ✓ Since putting the system in place, vet costs are 5% lower

Costs:

- The initial investment to install the system was about 6000 euros per 600 pig places so, assuming 10 years of depreciation, the cost is 1 euro/pig place/year
- The cost of the materials is about 600 euros per year, while maintaining the system costs 50 euros per year
- They produce their own straw which helps keep costs manageable
- Extra labour is about 1.5 to 2 hours per day

Further Research and Project Links

<https://www.eupig.eu/>
Link to technical report
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