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PREVALENCE OF TAIL BITING IN PIGS AND ASSOCIATIONS TO CARCASS CONDEMNATIONS – A FINNISH PILOT STUDY

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The aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of tail biting in Finland and the relationship between tail biting and carcass condemnation. Tail docking as a way of controlling tail biting is not allowed in Finland.

The material consisted of 10852 pigs slaughtered during one week at a Finnish abattoir. The quality of each tail was classified as healthy, healed tail biting or inflamed tail biting. The length of the tail was recorded as normal or short (< 10 cm). A tail that was both inflamed and short was defined as severely bitten. Associations between tail biting and risk of carcass condemnations were estimated using $\chi^2$-tests. Tests were performed with SPSS (8.0) for Windows.

A total of 35% of the pigs had bitten tails. 12% of all pigs had inflamed tail bites, while 23% showed evidence of healed tail biting. 1.3% of the pigs had severely bitten tails. All kinds of tail biting increased the risk for both whole and partial carcass condemnations ($p < 0.001$ for all). This was especially clear in pigs with severe tail biting: 27% of these pigs had at least some parts condemned, while the corresponding percentage for healthy-tailed pigs was 5.1% ($p < 0.001$). Especially the risk for condemnations due to arthritis and abscesses increased significantly in all kinds of tail bitten pigs ($p < 0.01$ for all).

The percentage of tail biting was unexpectedly high and shows that tail biting is a serious problem in Finland. The result might by slightly exaggerated as healed tail bites possibly include some tails injured otherwise. Tail biting causes a highly increased risk of carcass condemnation, also in it’s less severe forms, showing that, in addition to being a serious welfare problem, tail biting causes big economical losses.