

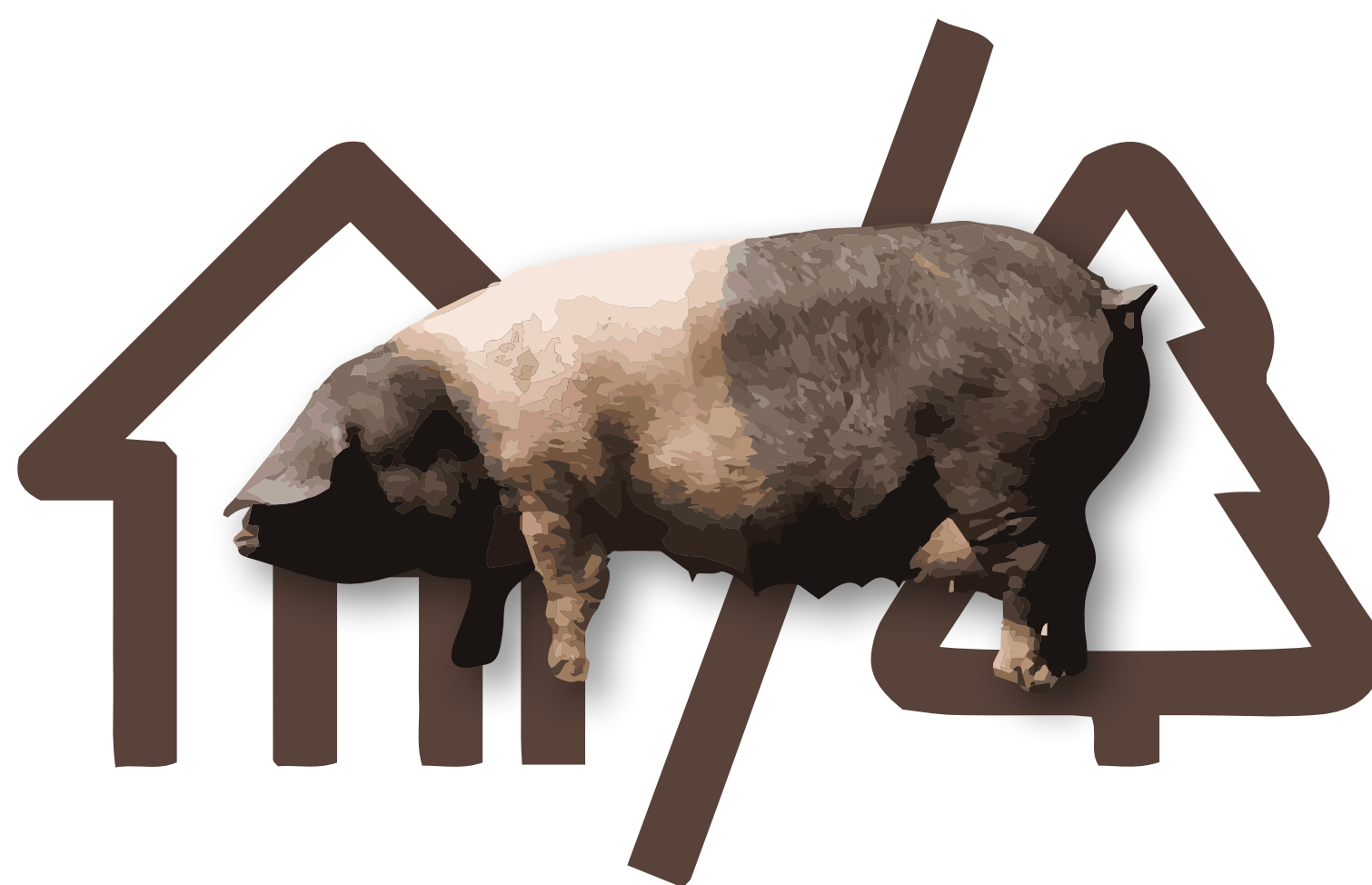
The Welfare of Pigs in Different Rearing Systems:

The Role of Enrichment on Pig Welfare

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1 Background and Objectives

Pigs are highly motivated to exhibit natural behaviours such as rooting, exploring their environment and nest building¹. The aim of this study was to investigate whether the use of enrichment materials can bring us closer to the welfare of pigs reared outdoors, where they have more space and can express their natural behaviour.

2 Material and Methods

The study was conducted on an indigenous Slovenian breed: the Krškopolje pig. Sixty pigs were used in the study (N = 60), divided into three groups of twenty pigs. The first group (A) was reared indoors, with the use of enrichment materials – pigs were kept in a large pen (50 m², 2.5m² per pig) lined with straw. The second (B) and third (C) groups were reared in outdoor systems, led by different farmers. We examined all groups over the four seasons. Using a AWQP-P survey², we assessed various aspects of animal welfare: (1) animal behaviour, (2) health status, (3) living conditions and, for the indoor group, (4) environmental conditions.

3 Results

The welfare of the pigs was high in all groups, with no major differences between the groups.

The (2) health status and (3) living conditions of the group A were similar to the group B and higher than group C, as the farmer used different farming equipment – e.g., water was provided in large water tanks, shelter had no bedding.

Surprisingly, the biggest anomaly was found in the outdoor pigs, as they all got severe sunburns during the summer months, despite having the possibility to retreat to a shelter.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

By using enrichment materials we can improve the welfare of indoor pigs to the extent that it is comparable to the welfare of pigs in outdoor breeding systems.

Pigs reared outside can express natural behaviour, are not confined to crates, and usually have a higher level of welfare.

Breeding pigs with a high level of welfare also means healthier pigs, consequently better production results and higher profit for the breeder.



Figure 1. Group A – Krškopolje pigs, reared indoors (photo: J. Plut)



Figure 2: Group B – Krškopolje pigs, reared outdoors (photo: J. Plut)



Figure 3: Group C – Krškopolje pigs, reared outdoors, sunburnt pigs visible (photo: J. Plut)

References

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