

Slaughterhouse monitoring of tail-docking and tail biting lesions of pigs in Portugal

Ana Rita Franco¹; Susana Gonçalves²; Margarida Fonseca Cardoso¹; Eduarda Gomes-Neves^{1,3}

¹ ICBAS-Universidade do Porto, Portugal; ² DGAV-Direção Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária; ³ CECA-ICETA Universidade do Porto

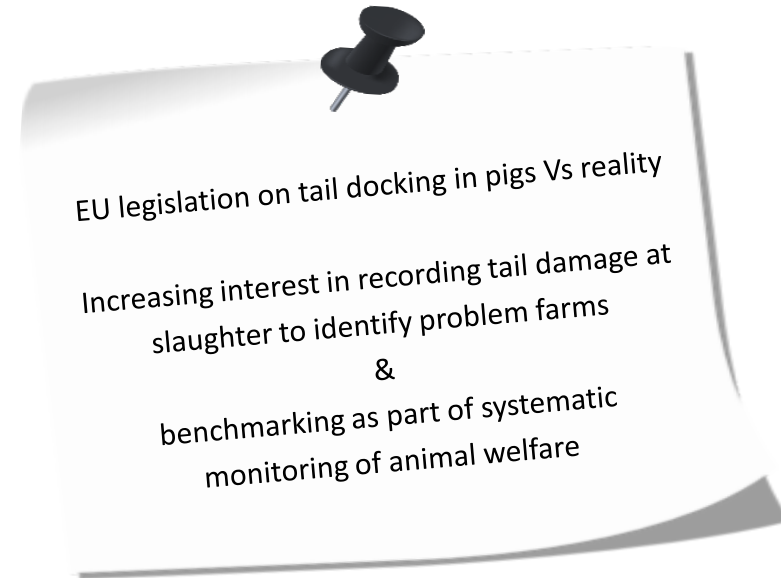
emneves@icbas.up.pt



Goals:

1. Assess tail-docking and tail biting in slaughter pigs
2. Evaluate the association of tail lesions with meat inspection findings

Why?
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Data collection:

- When: 24 non-consecutive days between October and December 2019
- Where: At 4 pig slaughterhouses in the north of Portugal
- How: During checks on food chain information and at ante- and post-mortem meat inspection, always carried out by the same observer

Recorded data per batch: farm identification code, batch size, category of animals (weaners/fattening pigs), classification on tail docking (considered a docked batch if at least 10% of the pigs presented docked tails), number of total carcass condemnations, number of pigs with tail lesions (distinguishing 3 levels of lesion)

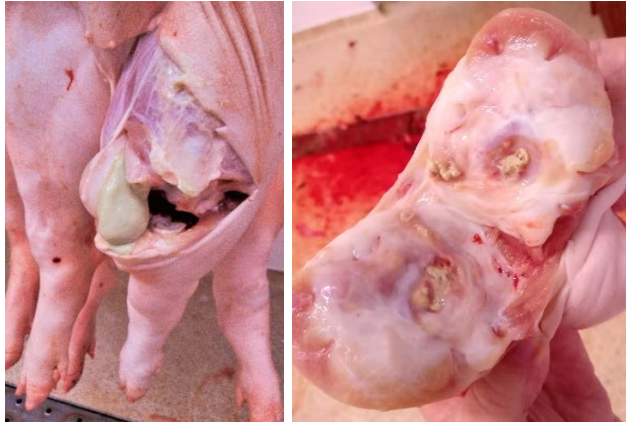


Sample:

- Total of 10146 pigs (from 196 batches)
- 4090 weaners (132 batches from 62 farms)
- 6056 fattening pigs (54 batches from 43 farms)

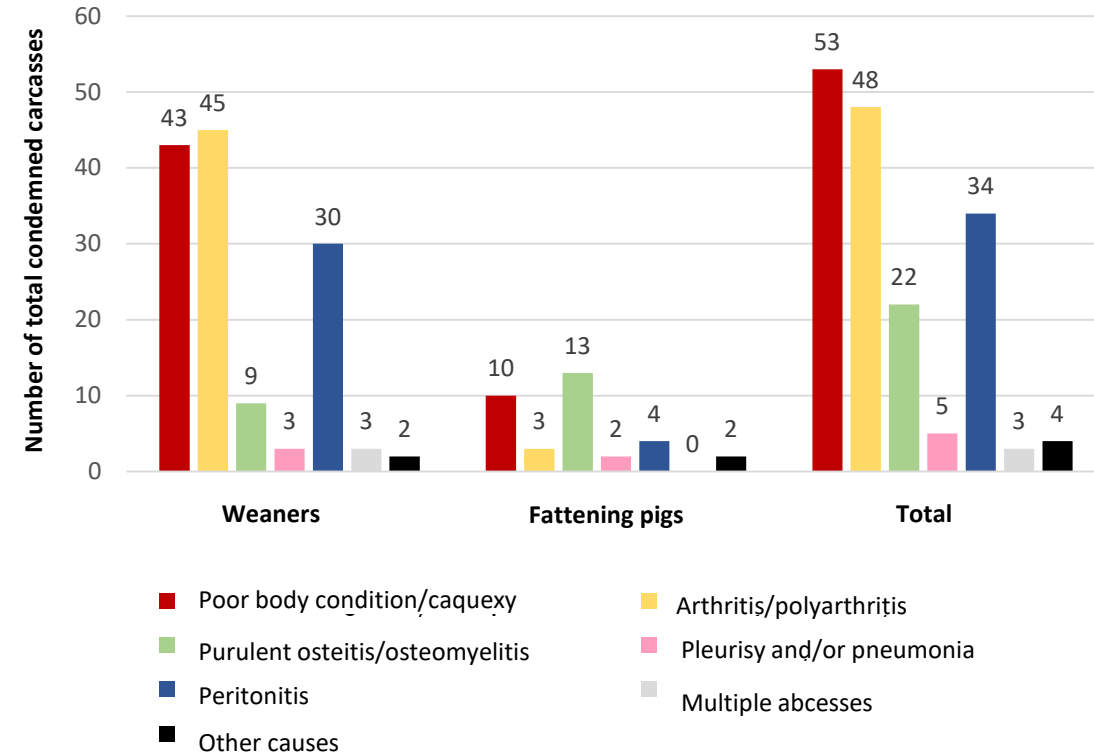
Results of postmortem meat inspection:

- ✓ Six main causes of total carcass condemnation were observed;
- ✓ Poor body condition (31.4%), arthritis/polyarthritis (28.4%) and peritonitis (20.1%) were the most frequent;
- ✓ 169 carcasses (1,7%) were totally condemned;
- ✓ Condemnation prevalence higher in weaners (3.3%) when compared to fattening pigs (0.6%);



Arthritis/polyarthritis (left) (33.3%) and purulent osteitis/osteomyelitis (right) (38.2%) were the predominant causes of condemnation within weaners and fattening pig carcasses, respectively.

Conditions responsible for total carcass condemnations



Batch analysis – Tail lesions and meat inspection findings:

- ✓ Most batches had either low proportion of carcass condemnations or none at all;
- ✓ 42 batches (21%) were considered worrying/unsatisfactory regarding tail biting and the remaining 154 had satisfactory results;
- ✓ No association between tail lesions and post-mortem condemnations was observed;
- ✓ The average proportion of carcass condemnations/batch in worrying/unsatisfactory batches and satisfactory ones was similar (3.25% and 2.88%, respectively).

Conclusions – Future perspectives:

- Tail docking is still a routine procedure often performed in portuguese pig farms;
- Tail biting remains a welfare problem in intensive pig production systems in Portugal, affecting animals in the early stages of life;
- Futher research with increased sample size is needed to generate useful information and to establish adapted farm health and welfare management plans.