Tail biting in pigs: comparison of tail lesions at the farm and slaughterhouse level

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INTRODUCTION

Based on Directive 2008/120/CE many countries implemented a monitoring plan to prevent tail biting and reduce tail docking at farm and/or abattoir level.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a tail injury monitoring system at the abattoir in docked (DA) and undocked animals (UA).

MATERIAL & METHODS

Tail lesions in individually identified DA (n=470) and UA (n=440) were recorded before transportation to slaughter and during post-mortem inspection. Based on European legislation no animal was transported with a visible "open" injury. Tails were scored in level 0 (no evidence of tail biting), S1 (scarred lesions without loss of the tail) or S2 (scarred lesions with partial or total loss of the tail). At the slaughterhouse, scored 0 and S1 animals were analyzed as one group, due to difficulty to classify with 100% of precision both lesions.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

At farm, tail biting was only observed (311/440, 70.7%) in the UA, that were classified before transport to slaughter as S1 (N=78) and S2 (N=233). At slaughterhouse, 25 from the 440 UA, presented other tail injuries that may had occurred during transportation or in the abattoir holding pens. In the remaining 415 animals, it was possible to evaluate the agreement between the classification made on the farm and that carried out at the abattoir.

Of the 191 UA with tails classified in 0 or S1 at farm (figure 1), 110 (57.6%) were classified with the equivalent score at abattoir (figure 2). The remaining 81 animals were classified with score S2 due to apparent partial loss of the tail (false-positive). From the 224 UA classified in S2 at farm (figure 3), 200 (89.3%) were classified with the same score at abattoir (figure 4). In the remaining 24 animals (false-negative), the partial loss of the tail was not detected during post-mortem inspection.

Figure 1

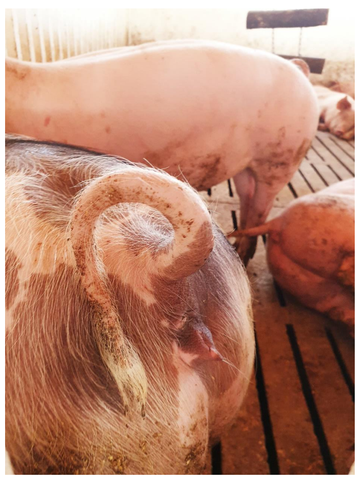
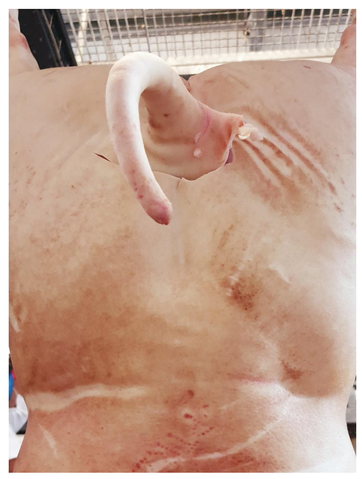


Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4



CONCLUSION

The results pointing out to the difficulty to correctly evaluate the variability of the size in long tails of the undocked animals in order to properly identify partial loss of the tail, the more frequent score (S2) found in this study and the most relevant in terms of animal welfare. For that reason, further studies should be developed to fill this gap.

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