



Low Social Status Pigs Suffer More Injuries and Fear

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Growing pigs with lower social status suffer more injuries and are more fearful of being exposed to new experiences a leading scientific journal reveals.

The study is in the November issue of ***Animal Welfare*** (volume 13, issue 4) which is published by leading charity the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare.

Pigs are a gregarious species that form social hierarchies through aggressive behaviour when litters are mixed in the rearing environment. Evidence suggests that social status within hierarchies has a marked effect on welfare.

Researchers reared 128 pigs in barren or enriched environments from birth until they were slaughtered at 21 weeks. The pigs were split into groups and assigned high or low social status depending on how aggressive they were when mixing. Injury levels were assessed on a weekly basis from eight to 21 weeks. The groups were allocated to barren and enriched rearing environments.

The aim of the study was to assess whether environmental enrichment, in the form of a complex pen design, leads to improvements in the welfare of pigs with low social status. The pigs underwent tests to assess how they competed for food. Fear responses to a novel pen were also assessed.

Pigs with low social status had more injuries to the head, neck and ears thus compromising their welfare. They were not as good at obtaining food and were frightened of their new environment in the novel pen test.

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE



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Environmental enrichment did not reduce injury rates, but did help the pigs to cope better with food competition and made them less timid of new surroundings.

The research was done at the Pig Unit of the Agricultural Research Institute of Northern Ireland.

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Notes to Editors

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (www.ufaw.org.uk) is an internationally recognised, independent, scientific and educational charity. It promotes high standards of welfare for all animals including wild, captive, farm, laboratory animals and pets. It depends on members and supporters for all funding. UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarship schemes; by public education especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, articles, technical reports and in its quarterly scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to government departments including the drafting of legislation and guidelines, and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

"Improvements in the care of animals are not now likely to come of their own accord, merely by wishing them: there must be research and it is in sponsoring research of this kind, making its results widely known, that UFAW performs one of its most valuable services." (Sir Peter Medawar, CBE, FRS, 8th May 1957 – Nobel Laureate (1960), Chairman of the UFAW Scientific Advisory Committee 1951-1962)

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