

## **A pilot investigation of possible positive system descriptors in finishing pigs**

*S Mullan\*<sup>†</sup>, SA Edwards<sup>‡</sup>, A Butterworth<sup>†</sup>, HR Whay<sup>†</sup> and DCJ Main<sup>†</sup>*

<sup>†</sup> University of Bristol Veterinary School, Langford BS40 5DU, UK

<sup>‡</sup> Newcastle University, School of Agriculture Food & Rural Development, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 7RU, UK

\* Contact for correspondence and requests for reprints: Siobhan.mullan@bris.ac.uk

### **Abstract**

---

*In this study, pig producers were identified whose practices exceeded the basic legal requirements and government recommendations for pig welfare. This novel approach was part of a larger project investigating the feasibility and benefits of the inclusion of some animal-based welfare outcome measures into the main UK pig farm assurance schemes. A set of pig-keeping-system descriptor scores were devised through consultation with stakeholders, whereby a finishing pig-farm would be classified on a scale of 1 (legislation compliance) to 5 (highest level of welfare provision) for six different elements of pig husbandry which can influence pig welfare (environmental enrichment, foraging behaviour, thermal comfort, physical comfort, tail docking and floor space provision). Animal-based observations were used to assess the welfare of a sample of between 67 and 220 pigs on 15 UK finishing pig farms, which were also classified according to the system descriptors. Scores achieved when assessing the environmental enrichment and physical comfort elements were significantly positively correlated with a qualitative assessment of good mood of the pigs and a measure of their oral manipulation and significantly negatively correlated with the prevalence of tail lesions and swollen bursae. However, there were wide variations in the prevalence of animal-based welfare outcome measures between farms with the same system descriptor score. These system descriptors are therefore not sufficient to be used alone to provide assurances on welfare. It is suggested that a combined approach of system descriptors and animal-based welfare outcome measures may be useful for providing assurances on higher levels of welfare.*

---

**Keywords:** *animal welfare, farm assurance, farming system, husbandry, pig, welfare outcomes*