Standardising the assessment of environmental enrichment and tail-docking legal requirements for finishing pigs in Europe

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Abstract

An online training package providing a concise synthesis of the scientific data underpinning EU legislation on enrichment and tail-docking of pigs was produced in seven languages, with the aim of improving consistency of professional judgements regarding legislation compliance on farms. In total, 158 participants who were official inspectors, certification scheme assessors and advisors from 16 EU countries completed an initial test and an online training package. Control group participants completed a second identical test before, and Training group participants after, viewing the training. In Section 1 of the test participants rated the importance of modifying environmental enrichment defined in nine scenarios from 1 (not important) to 10 (very important). Training significantly increased participants' overall perception of the need for change. Participants then rated nine risk factors for tail-biting from 1 (no risk) to 10 (high risk). After training scores were better correlated with risk rankings already described by scientists. Scenarios relating to tail-docking and management were then described. Training significantly increased the proportion of respondents correctly identifying that a farm without tail lesions should stop tail-docking. Finally, participants rated the importance of modifying enrichment in three further scenarios. Training increased ratings in all three. The pattern of results indicated that participants' roles influenced scores but overall the training improved: i) recognition of enrichments that, by virtue of their type or use by pigs, may be insufficient to achieve legislation compliance; ii) knowledge on risk factors for tail-biting; and iii) recognition of when routine tail-docking was occurring.

Keywords: animal welfare, enrichment, inspector, legislation, pig, tail-docking

Introduction

Animal welfare legislation has been developed for many countries and many species. However, the impact of legislation on animal welfare depends upon its full implementation in practice. In addition to appropriate awareness in the farming community, full implementation of EU legislation requires consistent assessment by those responsible for ensuring compliance. This can include official inspectors responsible for enforcement actions and assessors working for voluntary certification schemes that also aim to ensure compliance with legal prescriptions.

The complexity of the technical interpretation of legislation varies considerably between different requirements, depending on the availability of measurable criteria to define them. For example, assessing compliance with space allowance requirements necessitates measurement of the space, the number and, often, size of the animals housed in that space. In comparison, environmental enrichment is more difficult to quantify and calls for a professional judgement. Standardising this professional judgement is necessary for consistent implementation. This can be particularly challenging when legislation, such as European Directives, is implemented by many different countries each using different inspection regimes.

This study describes an initiative aimed at improving the consistency of professional judgements needed to assess compliance with the environmental enrichment and tail-docking requirements for finishing pigs included in EU Directive 2008/120/EC as detailed below: