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Preference for and behavioural response to environmental enrichment in a small population of sexually mature, commercial boars

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Abstract

An increasing public concern over the welfare of livestock species is motivating more producers to consider changes to production practices. Providing environmental enrichment for intensively housed animals is one such potentially welfare-enhancing change. The goal of environmental enrichment is to provide biologically relevant environmental stimuli that allows an animal to perform highly motivated, species-specific behaviours. To date, there is no research specific to the applicability of environmental enrichment for commercial boars (*Sus scrofa domesticus*), nor on commercial boar welfare in general. In this study, eight individually housed, mature boars were observed to prefer interacting with hanging cotton rope enrichment over hanging rubber chew sticks when given the option. There was a significantly negative correlation between the amount of time boars spent interacting with rope and the amount of time they spent performing stereotypic pen manipulation, suggesting that the rope was more effective at reducing stereotypic behaviour than the rubber. Such reductions in amount of time spent performing abnormal stereotypic behaviours could indicate that some of the animals' behavioural needs are being met by the enrichment object. Thus, the results of this study could help provide producers with more objective, research-based suggestions concerning the efficacy of practical enrichment choices for individually housed boars.

Keywords: animal welfare, boar, commercial swine, environmental enrichment, single housing, stereotypic behaviour