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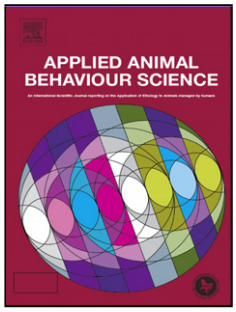

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Early Indicators of Tail Biting Outbreaks in Pigs

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Highlights

- Tail biting in pigs is unpredictable so early indicators could help farmers
- Behaviour of tail biting vs no tail biting groups observed for 1 week pre-outbreak
- Outbreak groups had fewer curly tails and more tucked tails
- Activity pre-outbreak was no different in outbreak groups
- Day and time of day had little or no effect on these findings

Abstract

Tail biting outbreaks in pig farming cause suffering through pain and stress, and producers lose revenue due to carcass condemnation. Reliable behavioural indications of when an outbreak is imminent would provide farmers with tools for mitigating the outbreak in advance. This study investigated changes in body and tail posture in the 7 days pre-outbreak.

Pigs in 15 groups with a mean (± s.d.) group size of 27.5 (± 2.6; 427 in total) were raised from birth under intensive commercial conditions and with tails intact. Twice daily inspections were made, and a tail biting outbreak was identified (and treated) if 3 or more pigs had fresh tail injuries, or any pig was seen with a freshly bleeding tail or vigorously biting a tail. Video footage was recorded continuously to allow pre-outbreak behaviour recording of body posture