The effect of rubber enrichment device design and amount on the welfare of pregnant gilts

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**Introduction**

Provision of manipulable material = legal requirement for pigs
- Allows pigs to perform investigatory and chewing behaviour
- Reduces harmful behaviours - tail and ear biting
- Straw, and other organic materials generally favoured by pigs

**However**
- Provision of loose material not possible in slatted systems
- Hanging rubber devices are often used instead, as chew toys could a floor device provide additional benefits?

**Objective**

To determine whether a rubber, floor based enrichment device could improve behaviour and reduce lesions in pigs, compared with a hanging fixed point device

**Methodology**

**4 Treatments**

- 1 hanging device / group
- 3 hanging devices / group
- 1 floor device / group
- 3 floor devices / group

- 36 gilts managed as one group provided with treatments
- Treatments applied over time, duration of 4 days each
- 3 day ‘control’ period (3 hanging + 3 floor) between treatments

**Measures**

**Device measures**
- Arm length
- Device weight

**Health measures**
- Ear and tail lesion scores

**Behaviour measures**
- Video recording on last 2 treatment days between 0900 - 1700
- Scan samples at 5 min intervals: No pigs interacting with devices
- 8 behaviour bouts / day analysed for duration and no displacements

**Pigs had the same number of interactions with the floor devices, regardless of no. in the pen, and interaction bouts were almost X5 longer than with the hanging devices**

**Results and Discussion**

**Device weight**

**Device arm length**

**Ear and tail lesions**
- No effect of device or amount on tail lesions
- Lower ear lesion scores when 3 devices provided than 1 (P < 0.05)

**Amount of interactions with the device**

**Interaction duration**

- No effect of displacements on bout duration, but more displacements when only 1 floor device than any other treatment (P < 0.001)

**Conclusion**

This floor based enrichment device appeared more attractive to pigs than a hanging device, and could be an effective enrichment device for slatted systems

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All enrichment devices used in this trial were provided by Easifix: http://www.easyfix.ie/