



TAIL DOCKING AND TOOTH CLIPPING

Q: What is tail docking and why is it done?

A: Tail docking is a procedure whereby a **portion of a young piglet's tail is permanently removed**. Tail docking is carried out **to prevent or reduce tail biting**.

Q: Why does tail biting occur?

A: Tail biting occurs for several reasons, but the main reasons are **barren environment and bad management**. Tail biting is an important symptom that can derive from several factors, such as lack of space to express normal behaviours, inadequate climate control, low quality of feeding and poor health. **One very important risk factor is the absence of materials that pigs can investigate**. In many intensive pig farming systems, pigs have very limited opportunities to explore with their snouts or look for food. Pigs are very curious and intelligent. When they have nothing else to do, pigs may start to investigate and play with each others' tails. Some will chew on other pigs' tails and cause lesions. Docking tails to prevent biting means fighting a symptom. But it's the problems behind tail biting that need to be solved.

Q: How many piglets are tail-docked in the European Union (EU)?

A: The number can only be estimated, because member states are not obliged to report the percentage of pigs that are tail docked. However, recent data from the European Commission and from the industry shows that most countries still allow routine tail docking. Notable exceptions are Sweden and Finland. **We estimate that as many as 2,800 million piglets have been tail docked illegally since updated EU legislation on pig welfare came into force in 2003**. This is primarily due to bad housing and management practices on pig farms as well as lack of enforcement of the legislation by member states and by the EU.

Q: But is tail docking legal in the EU?

A: According to Directive 2008/120/EC, which confirms a previous Directive of 2001 (entered into force in 2003), **tail docking of piglets cannot be carried out on a routine basis**, but only if there is evidence of tail biting in a specific farm, and only if all other measures taken by the farmer to remedy the situation have failed.

Q: How can tail biting be prevented other than by tail-docking?

A: Tail biting is a multi-factorial problem that needs to be addressed by changing management. One important risk factor for tail biting is lack of environmental enrichment that pigs can explore. This can be reduced by **providing materials that pigs can investigate**. Optimal materials that can be used as bedding to provide enrichment are hay, grass, silage, and root vegetables. However, in fully slatted systems, where providing deep bedding is not feasible, straw or hay can be given in racks and cut in short pieces. Adding even a few grams of fresh, clean straw per day and per pig as enrichment can already have positive effects in preventing tail biting.

Pigs also need to be provided with **enough space, nutrition of good quality, adequate climate, and healthcare**. All of those factors have a role to play in determining the risk of tail biting.

Q: What is tooth clipping?

A: Tooth clipping is a procedure that consists in **cutting (clipping) or grinding away the top portion of the corner teeth of young piglets**.

Q: Why is tooth clipping carried out?

A: Tooth clipping or grinding is carried out **to prevent injuries to littermates' faces and the sow's teats**, when piglets compete for the best position to suckle milk.

Q: Is tooth clipping legal in the EU?

A: According to Directive 2008/120/EC, **tooth clipping of piglets cannot be carried out on a routine basis**, but should be prevented by changing management and should only be carried out if all other measures taken by the farmer to remedy the situation have failed.

Q: Do we have information on how many piglets are tooth-clipped in the EU?

A: Although the routine tooth clipping of young piglets is not permitted in the EU, **there is no official data** on the proportion of piglets that still undergo this procedure.

Q: What can be done to avoid tooth clipping?

A: **Tooth clipping can be avoided by changing management practices and breeding goals**. Piglets bite each other when there is a lot of competition for the sows' teats. Selecting for lower litter sizes, selecting calm sows with good maternal abilities, and giving the sow appropriate nutrition to ensure a good milk supply can help eliminate the need to carry out tooth clipping.

Q: What can I do to help end these practices?

A: Please **sign our petition** and ask your Agricultural Minister to enforce EU legislation and stop the routine tail docking and tooth clipping of all piglets.