

Pigs prefer 3 square meals a day

June 24 2008

Pigs raised in conventional indoor pens have different feeding patterns from those raised under more natural conditions. Research published today in BioMed Central's open access journal *Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica* shows that while pigs in the wild spend much time searching for food and eat little and often, the preferred feeding regime for conventional raised pigs is three meals a day.

Lead author, Eva Persson, from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences explains that, "The natural feeding behaviour of pigs is searching for feed by rooting activities throughout the day; self-feeding pigs randomly space their activities and generally consume between ten and twelve meals in an average day. By replicating this pattern in conventional indoor kept pigs, we had hoped they would fare better than those fed the traditional three meals."

All of the 360 pigs in the study received the same amount of food, spaced out into either three meals or nine and delivered as liquid feed. Contrary to what may be expected, feeding the pigs in a more 'natural' way did not result in a better outcome. In fact, the pigs fed three times gained over 100g more per day than the pigs fed more frequently.

As Persson reports, "Increased daily feeding occasions among group-housed pigs resulted in a poorer daily weight gain and an increased number of stomach problems. It will be of great interest to those in the farming and animal welfare fields that this study does not support increased daily feeding occasions in fattening pigs".

Each group of nine pigs in this study had to share one 3 m trough. Due to the fact that pigs will naturally fight for prime feeding positions, one likely explanation for the poorer performance in the pigs fed more often is increased competition within the group. The authors note 'More feeds mend smaller ratios each time and it is possible that each feeding occasion in our study did not offer enough feed to satisfy the hunger of all the pigs'.

Citation: "Increasing daily feeding occasions in restricted feeding strategies does not improve performance or well being of fattening pigs ", Eva Persson, Margret Wulbers-Mindermann, Charlotte Berg and Bo Algiers, Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica

Source: BioMed Central

Citation: Pigs prefer 3 square meals a day (2008, June 24) retrieved 7 June 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-06-pigs-square-meals-day.html>

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