

Rubber slat mats could improve animal well-being

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New research shows that rubber slat mats could improve swine health. In a new study in the *Journal of Animal Science*, researchers in Europe studied how different types of flooring affects claw and limb lesions, locomotion and flooring cleanliness.

According to the researchers, flooring is one of the main factors in production systems that cause locomotory problems in swine. Locomotory problems can be caused by joint injuries or by [circulatory problems](#) in the legs and feet.

Julia Calderón-Díaz, a PhD candidate at University of College Dublin, said pregnant sows placed on cushioned flooring would have a lower risk of being lame compared with sows placed on concrete.

In this experiment, researchers studied the effects of two types of flooring on pregnant gilts in Ireland. One hundred sixty-four pregnant gilts were divided into two groups. One group was housed on concrete slatted floors, and the other group was housed on concrete slatted floors covered in rubber slat mats.

The researchers scored [locomotion](#) and claw and limb lesion of the replacement gilts and [flooring](#) cleanliness periodically. The replacement gilts were observed from the time they were bred until 110 days into their pregnancy.

Dr. Alan Fahey, a lecturer at the University College Dublin said the gilts

were studied during two pregnancies. The results were similar during both pregnancies. Sows housed on rubber mats had a reduced risk of swelling and wounds on the limbs. However, the rubber mats increased the risk of sole and heel [lesions](#).

Calderón-Díaz said these lesions were possibly caused by slurry accumulation over the rubber mats. She said these lesions were not severe and could be addressed through modifications of the rubber slat mats.

In the European Union, pregnant sows must be group housed four weeks after breeding until one week before farrowing. This rule has been in effect since January. Calderón-Díaz said other countries are likely to use group housing for pregnant sows in the near future.

More information: This article is titled "Longitudinal study of the effect of rubber slat mats on locomotory ability, body, limb and claw lesions and dirtiness of group housed sows." It can be read in full at the journalofanimalscience.org.

Provided by American Society of Animal Science

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