



ENRICHMENT FOR SUCKER AND WEANER PIGS

ENRICHMENT IN THE SUCKER AND WEANER PHASE ALTERED
EXPLORATORY BEHAVIOUR AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM OF PIGS

Project Participants

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Problem

Providing young, developing pigs with a stimulating environment can be difficult in an economically viable enterprise. Past research into enrichment has been obstructed by habituation, where pigs become bored with the stimulation provided within 24 hours.

Project

Two research projects studied the way piglets interact with enrichment blocks in their pens, as well as how providing enrichment may improve pigs' cognitive development and their responses to weaning.

Value for Producers

The development of simple enrichment devices may improve the health, wellbeing, and development of pigs.



Results

Sucker pigs were not observed to interact with the enrichment blocks until they were about 25 days old, indicating there is no benefit to introducing a block earlier. Older sucker and weaner pigs interacted with the blocks until the experiment was concluded at 9 weeks.

In SARDI research (APL Project 2015/038), piglets were provided with enrichment blocks and the benefits were evaluated in an open field/novel object test, a maze test and an executive function test. The results suggested an increased willingness to explore.

A reduction in the proinflammatory response to weaning was also observed. In addition, there was a positive effect on haemoglobin, haematocrit, red blood cell distribution width and the number of platelets, as further evidence of a reduced inflammatory response in pigs provided with enrichment.

Recommendations

Enrichment blocks may provide piglets with an outlet for their natural curiosity and development, leading to a reduced negative reaction to weaning and to the development of healthier adults.

More Information

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