

# Enrichment

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRODUCERS

**Caring for pigs and putting their welfare first is not only the right thing to do, but it also makes good business sense. The production of high-quality pork demands a safe, healthy pig and a world class level of animal care.**

**Providing pigs with environmental enrichment is one such opportunity to improve welfare.**

Enrichment provides pigs with a stimulating environment which allows them to exhibit their natural behaviours: rooting and foraging, wallowing, and if pregnant, nesting.

It also reduces the prevalence of undesirable behaviours and stereotypies – tail biting is one such example.

Around 90% of Australia's pork is produced in indoor systems, and while these systems provide pigs with greater protection and a cleaner, more controlled environment, their design also limits opportunities for pigs to exhibit natural behaviours.

Globally, there has been increasing focus on providing enrichment to pigs. Europe has made a lot of progress in this space by driving enrichment

use in piggeries through legislation, in addition to voluntary programs and schemes. In comparison, the US and Brazilian pig industries are still in the early stages of researching, designing, and introducing pig enrichment. It is expected, however, that these efforts will gain further momentum globally, driven by the ever-increasing push for improved farm animal welfare from the public and consumers.

This trend towards high-welfare pork production is here in Australia too. Pigs are intelligent, curious animals, and while a shift to group housing in recent years has improved welfare by better supporting their spatial and social needs, there is still progress to be made, and providing pigs with enrichment is an excellent place to start.

### BENEFITS OF ENRICHMENT






- Reduced stress in pigs
- Better pig welfare due to them being able to exhibit natural behaviours like rooting, foraging, and nesting
- Reduced aggression
- Reduced negative physical interactions with each other e.g. belly-nosing, ear biting, tail biting
- Reduced stillborns
- Improved piglet survival and growth

### CHALLENGES WITH ENRICHMENT





- Costs associated with sourcing, storing, and maintaining enrichment items or substrates
- Labour associated with placing and cleaning/ maintaining enrichment in sheds and pens
- Long straw and hays have the potential to block the effluent systems beneath sheds, especially where slatted flooring is used
- Natural materials (straw, hays, and woods) are a potential biosecurity risk. It is important to source these from a reputable supplier and store them in a dry location away from pests



Environmental enrichment for pigs can take many forms, and varies for pigs of different ages and stages, but as a general rule, should be:

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|---|--|---|---|--|
|    |   |  |    |   |
| <b>Effective and safe</b>   | <b>Placed appropriately</b>  | <b>Sufficient quantity</b>  | <b>Appropriately sized</b>  | <b>Maintained</b>  |
| It should both meet the need of pigs, and be safe for the pigs to interact with, as well as free of any disease-causing agents or chemicals | It should be at an accessible height, and close to but not inside eating, drinking, dunging, and sleeping areas. It should also not be placed anywhere that will encourage competition (eg. in a corner) | Otherwise, it may encourage competition or even aggression in the pigs            | Pigs like to engage with a lot of the enrichment materials via their mouths, and if they are unable to bite, chew, or even eat it, it will not hold their attention | Enrichment should be replaced or cleaned to ensure it is still fit for purpose, and not spreading disease between pens or batches of animals |

To appropriately encourage rooting, foraging and nesting, the provided enrichment should have some or all of the following features:

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| <b>Investigable</b>  | <b>Manipulable</b>   | <b>Chewable</b>   | <b>Edible</b>  |
| Able to be explored with a pig's nose and mouth                                    | Its location, appearance, and structure should be able to be changed by the pigs   | Malleable and can be manipulated by chewing   | Something (in addition to regular feed) that pigs can eat and which has some nutritional value |

Based on the above, research categorises the standard of enrichment items as follows:

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|--|--|--|
| <b>1 Gold standard</b>   | <b>2 Silver standard</b>   | <b>3 Bronze standard</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bedding in the form of:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Straw</li><li>• Lucerne hay</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Straw/hay provided as a ball/cylinder/in a rack or dispenser</li><li>• Chaff</li><li>• Hessian sacks</li><li>• Shredded paper</li><li>• Wood shavings</li><li>• Suspended rope</li><li>• Enrichment/nutritional blocks</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Branched chains</li><li>• Hard woods</li></ul> |

**Where gold-standard enrichment cannot be provided, a combination of different silver and bronze standard enrichment is recommended.**

## MORE INFORMATION

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