

Impact of stockmanship on the welfare of sows

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Current challenges to sow husbandry

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Does success depend on the housing system?

In The Netherlands:

- Group housing of sows from 4 days after service
- > sows during 'critical phase' in groups!
- More returns to service?

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Housing system & sow reproductive performance

- Nearly 900 farms in telephone survey
- 80% answered questions regarding
 - Sow group housing system (wide range)
 - Timing of introduction to the group (4 days - 4 weeks)
 - Returns to service

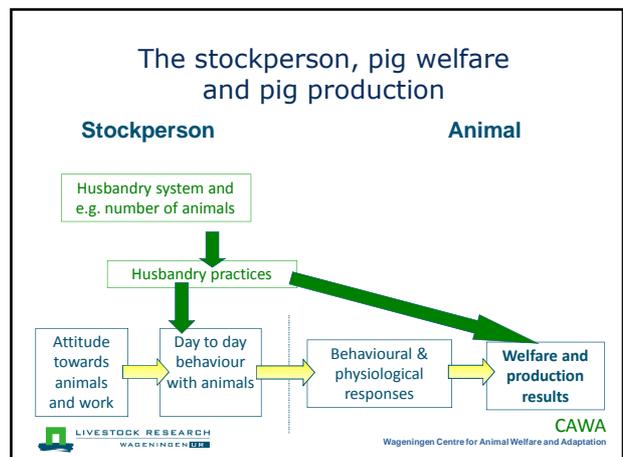
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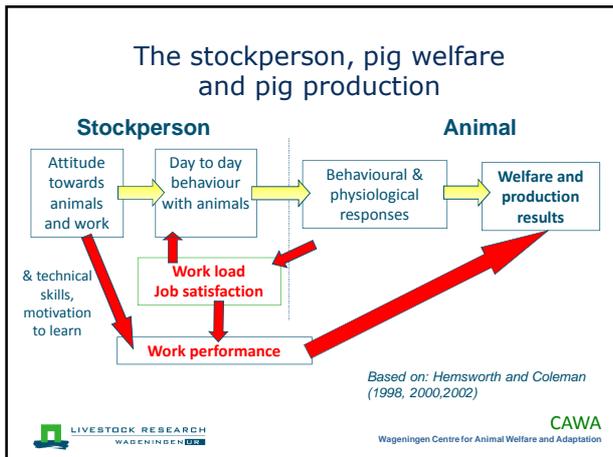
Housing system & sow reproductive performance

- Nearly 900 farms in telephone survey
- 80% answered questions regarding
 - Sow group housing system (wide range)
 - Timing of introduction to the group (4 days - 4 weeks)
 - Returns to service
- Average pregnancy rate: 87%, range: 70-96%
 - No effect of housing system
 - No effect of timing of introduction!

Van der Peet et al., 2009

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The stockperson, pig welfare and pig production

- The challenge for farm management is to combine farm profitability with animal welfare requirements
- Within the constraints of his farm, a good stockperson will look for opportunities to improve animal health, welfare and performance.

-> A stockperson needs to be inquisitive & creative

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Current challenges to sow husbandry

- Space for sows vs crushing of piglets
- Space for sows vs loss of production

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Towards group housing in 2013

- Establishing a hierarchy is essential
- Sow aggression is unavoidable
- How to minimise the effects of aggression?
- Can we reduce the impact of fights?
- Can we help sows to avoid aggression?

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Social skills can be taught

- The farrowing accommodation affects how piglets use their social skills

Week	28.0 m2	6.7 m2	3.5 m2
0.5	35	65	65
1	45	65	65
2	20	45	65
3	15	45	65
5	10	25	45
8	10	25	45

Week	28.0 m2	6.7 m2	3.5 m2
0.5	5	5	5
1	5	5	5
2	5	5	5
3	5	5	5
5	10	5	5
8	40	15	5

Schouten, 1986

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Preparing gilts for addition to the sow group

- Repeated mixing between 4 and 10 weeks of age, will reduce aggression when sows are mixed at 5 months

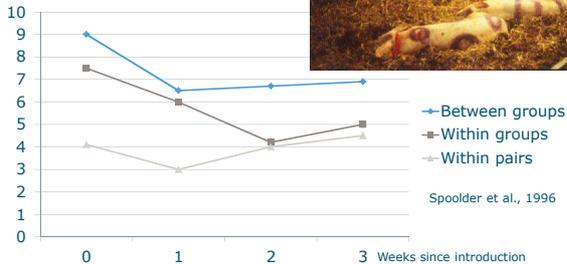
Mixing Frequency	Mixed (Mins)	Control (Mins)
E (2x)	65	65
E (3x)	35	55
E (4x)	25	70

(Van Putten & Bure, 1997)

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Sows remember each other

Average inter-individual distance (m)



Flight opportunities are important

Flight distances in a large space:

- 50% was <4.7 m
- 95% was < 13.6 m
- 4% was > 20 m

Kay et al., 1999

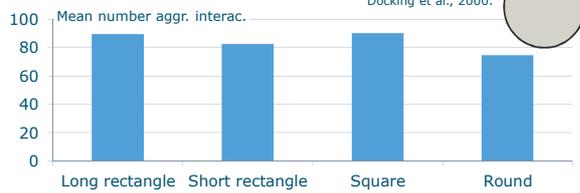


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Kay et al., 1999



Opportunities for creative minds

To support group housing, stockpersons who understand and use pig behaviour will aim to:

- Improve pig social skills early in life
- Keep subgroups together throughout different parities
- Allow subordinate (fleeing!) behaviour to be expressed, at least during group formation
- ... as well as a range of other actions they can take to facilitate a smooth formation of sow group hierarchy.



Increasing behavioural freedom for farrowing sows

.... without the additional crushing of piglets



- The majority of solutions are related to farrowing pen design
- Yet 'everyone' agrees that a good stockperson is crucial
- We need ideas on what a good stockperson does!



Will simple toys support nest building?

Two treatments

- E: Straw balls + Jute + Rope on floor (n=26)
- C: Rope on floor (n=18)

All materials offered from 2 days prior to expected farrowing date

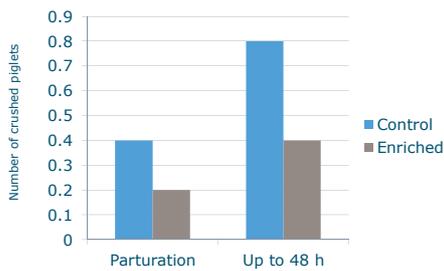


Jute bag



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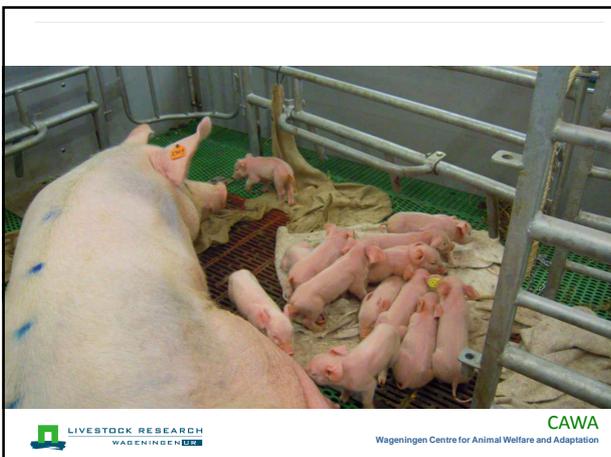
Pro Dromi easy nesting



Average number of crushed piglets for sows in crates



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Pro Dromi

Work in progress:

- Will piglets 'follow' the jute bag into their creep, and stay away from trouble?



Good stockmanship

- Skills, knowledge, personality & attitude
- Inquisitive & innovative: keen to discover more about the animals, and the system they are housed in
- A challenging 'life long learning' job!



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