

## Factors that Impact Pig Behavior

When pigs express negative behaviors such as tail and ear biting or fighting, performance and animal well being suffer. Losses on farm due to culling and mortalities caused by negative behavior can approach 5 to 10% of pigs in some cases. Packers discount hogs sold with tail damage, especially if abscesses are present. Combined, such losses can mean the difference between profit and loss for many producers. Numerous factors impact behavior of pigs. What follows is a list of points to consider when dealing with problem pigs.

- Tail length. Tails should be cut short at processing ( $\leq \frac{1}{4}$  inch in length) to prevent tail biting. Once tail-biting starts, it is extremely difficult to control. Prevention is crucial.
- Crowding, especially at heavier body weights ( $< 7.5$  ft<sup>2</sup>/pig in conventional pens,  $< 6.5$  ft<sup>2</sup>/pig in large pens).
- Poor pen layout without specific areas for dunging and sleeping.
- Manure buildup on floors that result in dirty sleeping areas and slippery surfaces that cause stress, lameness, injury, and irritability.
- Mixing pigs, especially when the number of pigs per pen is  $< 50$ .
- High gas levels in barns, especially ammonia concentrations  $> 10$  ppm.
- Poor air movement in barns, especially dead air spaces or draughts.
- Temperatures outside of pigs' thermoneutral zone (especially hot temperatures).
- Large temperature fluctuations ( $\geq 10^{\circ}\text{F}$  fluctuation in a 24 hr period).
- Misters that do not work properly (or at all) in hot weather.
- Poor health such as mycoplasma, SIV or PRRS outbreaks in mid to late finishing.
- Genotype changes, especially introduction of a new boar or sow line.
- For gilts, onset of puberty will initiate riding behaviors and irritability.
- Unusual or irregular stressors, such as sorting market pigs, vaccination, or curtain/fan malfunction.
- Limited access to feed or water due to poorly designed equipment or too many pigs per feeder or waterer space.
- Pigs out of feed.
- Feed delivery mistakes that result in low protein diets fed to early phase finisher pigs or high protein diets fed to late phase finisher pigs.
- Feed manufactured from mold- or mycotoxin-contaminated grain or rancid fat.
- Improperly manufactured diets including deletion of a major ingredient (premix, salt).
- Pellet quality problems.
- Pigs out of water or water pressure problems (low or high flow rates).
- Poor quality water (coliform or other contamination).
- Stray voltage.