

NADIS disease bulletins are written specifically for farmers, to increase awareness of prevalent conditions and promote disease prevention and control, in order to benefit animal health and welfare. Farmers are advised to discuss their individual farm circumstances with their veterinary surgeon.

Anal Biting

Biting and damage to the anus of growing pigs is a rare but extremely damaging condition that is normally categorised along with tail, flank and ear biting as a vice. As with these other forms of aberrant behaviour, the causes are often multiple and complex and can be particularly difficult to control.

Clinical Picture

Whilst the condition is not frequently seen, it occurs most often in the middle growing period of 20-60kg. Close observation may identify a single culprit as the instigator of it. The condition is seen irrespective of tail docking, being seen in all situations from pigs with undocked tails to those with the shortest dock.

It can be described more as a nibbling rather than the more devastating biting damage that is done to the tails but can become quite extensive as blood is revealed. It will occur in both sexes but in gilts can extend to include damage to the prepubertal vulva. The condition does not appear to be associated with oestrous onset in young gilts.

Trigger Factors

As with all vice patterns there are many factors which may trigger anal biting but the most common appears to be:-

- 1) High stocking density – close to legal maximum limits.
- 2) Variable temperatures – the condition has been reported recently by N.A.D.I.S. occurring in the widely varying temperatures of March.
- 3) High levels of competition for feed and water, not necessarily related to overall space provision.
- 4) Concurrent disease. As with most vice problems, diseased pigs tend to be “unhappy” pigs and are more prone to aberrant behaviour.

Consequences

In its mildest form, damage to the anus will heal without consequence. However, as the level of damage increases, the consequences become more serious. Straining as a result of damage can produce rectal prolapses with further more extensive damage and the well recognised consequences such as classic rectal stricture or even evisceration.

In early cases of anal damage, the pig is likely to become faecally incontinent but as severe damage heals, it can form a stricture similar to that seen with rectal prolapses and the result is that the pig is unable to pass faeces and gradually “blows up” whilst losing condition, becoming hairy and often jaundiced (yellow).

Gilts suffering concurrent vulva damage may be compromised as future breeders.

Treatment

There is little treatment that can be given other than isolation and supportive antibiotics. Where severe, humane destruction is necessary. Surgical repair whilst feasible is

uneconomic. Rapid identification and isolation of a single culprit will minimise the extent of the problem.

Prevention

By its very nature, anal biting tends to be sporadic in incidence and generally rare enough that it usually only occurs as a one off episode.

Attention to basic husbandry to minimise the trigger factors involved in all vice problems, are an essential part of disease control problems. Should anal biting become a recurrent problem in the herd, then a full review of the circumstances must be undertaken with the veterinary surgeon to identify and correct any inadequacies.

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