

Behavioural Diversity within Groups of Juvenile Pigs

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There is variability in pig performance and this may be related to individual behavioural characteristics. The objective of this study was to determine the primary characteristics that distinguish individual pigs and how a change in social environment affects their individual characteristics. Approximately 90 pigs (9 litters) were followed from birth until 18 weeks of age. All litters remained intact until they entered the grow-finish phase, where 4 litters were re-grouped. The following variables were collected per pig while in the farrowing room: average daily gain, teat order consistency, injury scores, general activity and social behaviour. While the pigs were in the nursery and grow-finish phases, in addition to the above variables, data from the following behavioural tests were collected: restraint, human approach, ease of movement, and novel arena (response to human and novel object).

The preliminary analysis of the data has identified 2 primary 'personality' factors that distinguish pigs before they enter grow-finish and are re-grouped. The two factors distinguish pigs based on their responses to humans (number of interactions) and their activity level (time spent standing).

Further analysis will indicate if re-grouping stress resulted in changes in 'personality' type.

Implications

The impact these 'personality' factors have on productivity will be investigated. This study will be expanded to investigate different re-grouping strategies (based on weight, behaviour or random) and form the basis of recommendations to the industry about the most appropriate strategies to use.