

REVEALING THE UNSEEN: SEVERE GASTRIC ULCERATION PROBLEMS SOLVED BY USE OF 24 H CAMERA SURVEILLANCE

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Introduction

A newly build finishing pig unit experienced problems with high mortality rates of 6% . Finishers were kept in large groups of 450 animals and fed liquid feed with several by-products. Flooring surface and feeding space was according to Dutch legislation. Symptoms: variable feed intake, coughing, pale animals, reduced growth. Pathology showed gastric ulceration. Feed interventions did not gave an improvement. No infectious respiratory disease was found. Climate parameters were not abnormal. The local veterinarian decided to consult a behavioural specialist for 24 h video analysis of animal behaviour.

Material and methods

6 high definition cameras were used for 24 h/ 7 d analysis of animal behaviour.

Results- 24h analysis showed a quiet group and no signs of fighting. Pigs used different areas for feeding, sleeping and defecating and showed normal diurnal patterns. However, too many pigs were lying in sternal or half lateral position and almost no pigs were in relaxed lateral position. Thorough research revealed a software error in the climate system occurring randomly during the day, which resulted in draught at those moments and an unpredictable environment for the finishers.

Discussion and conclusion

Finishers in their comfort zone usually lie in a lateral position. Other postures can be a sign of a chronic stressor: animals are not in their comfort zone and welfare is compromised. Farm visits by veterinarians and advisors on feed or climate are usually short and during daytime. Pigs are often aroused when people enter the unit and thereby valuable information on pig behaviour and health is lost. In more complex cases, video analysis provides valuable information in the field to reveal

abnormal behaviour related to health problems and/or compromised welfare. Moreover, using this video material is usually an easy way to convince caretakers, advisors and veterinarians that things need to be changed.