SKIN LESIONS ON HEAVY PIGS (SLAUGHTERED AT 170 KG) AND THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH THE PREVALENCE OF HAM DEFECTS

M. Bottacini¹, A. Scollo², S. Edwards³, B. Contiero¹, M. Veloci⁴, V. Pace⁵, F. Gottardo¹

¹Department of Animal Medicine, Production and Health-MAPS, University of Padova, Legnaro (PD), Italy; ²Swine practitioner Swivet Research snc, Reggio Emilia, Italy; ³School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Newcastle University, Newcastle, United Kingdom; ⁴Swine practitioner Suivet snc, Reggio Emilia, Italy; ⁵OPAS, Pig Farmer Association, San Giorgio (MN), Italy.

Introduction
Skin lesions due to fighting before slaughter are a welfare problem with economic losses for producers and abattoirs. The Aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of skin lesions at a slaughterhouse over one year in relation to slaughter season and overnight lairage, determining if they could have an impact on ham defects.

Materials & Methods
In one year 648 pig batches were scored during slaughter procedures for skin lesions and classified for ham defects according to IPQ (Italian Parma Quality) standards. The anterior and posterior parts of the carcass were separately scored according to a 3-point scale adapted from the Welfare Quality Protocol.

Results
An annual median of 64.0% of carcasses per batch with severe anterior scratches and a mean of 46.4% for posterior scratches were found. Autumn was the worst season for both skin lesions and ham defects (P<0.001). Overnight lairage resulted in higher prevalence of severe cranial scratches (70.2% vs 58.0%, P=0.02) and veining defect (1.96% vs 1.46%, P=0.002), while it had a preventive effect for petechial haemorrhaging (0.41% vs 0.84%, P<0.001). A correlation (r=0.27, P<0.001) was found between prevalence per batch of severe posterior scratches and IPQ hematomas.

Discussion & Conclusion
Although both skin lesions and IPQ hematomas showed a maximum during autumn, only a low positive correlation between them was found. This poor correlation can be partly explained by an inappropriate observer position on the slaughter line, indicated also by a 0 median for carcass external hematomas. The contradiction between our seasonal trends and those of previous studies reveal that other factors over-riding environmental conditions should be considered. In conclusion the present study confirms that skin lesions represent a problem also for heavy pigs and that overnight lairage and slaughtering season can affect their prevalence.