



WELFARE & NUTRITION

AWN-038

PIGGY TALK: PIGS TALK ABOUT THEIR CONDITION

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Introduction

Future evaluation and support of welfare in livestock needs non-invasive methods that provide a direct and accurate information on the animals' condition. Vocal communication among pigs could be one such indicator to determine the status of well-being in individuals and herds. Specific studies are missing, although vocalisation has extensively been used to indicate stress. Aim of the present study was to detect changes in vocalisation among pigs exposed to a slightly uncomfortable situation that would not really reduce their well-being.

Material & Methods

For this pilot study, three miniature pigs were observed daily at three consecutive time intervals of one week, each. The pigs used to be housed together in a spacious pen on straw beddings with hay and water ad libitum. Pigs were proffered about 50 g of a commercial pelleted food for fatteners, sometime in the morning and in the afternoon. During the first and third week of the trial, pellets were given exactly at 8 o'clock in the morning, and at 10 o'clock during the second week. The pigs were video recorded, behaviour and vocalisation were quantified. Vocalisation was dissected with the program Praat®.

Results

During the week with delayed feeding, laying periods were reduced, slightly aggressive interaction and rooting were increased. Concurrently, grunts were prolonged with an increase in frequency and volume. Some vocalisation parameters as detected by Praat® were specifically changed. At the same time, frequency and intensity of squeaking was reduced by delayed feeding.

Discussion & Conclusion

The results of the current study indicate that vocalization can provide sensible parameters to evaluate the condition of pigs, even before well-being is affected. Dissecting vocalisation by measures like Praat® can open a new field of studies aiming towards a more dispassionate understanding of the condition and even feeling of pigs in the future.