BioSecure
Enhanced and cost-effective biosecurity in livestock production

Teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

PRACTICE ABSTRACT # 28

Biosecurity considerations for providing enrichment to pigs

Environmental enrichment is a way to provide complexity and novelty to a pig's environment and fulfil their behavioural needs. Enrichment improves pig health and welfare by promoting species-specific exploratory, social, and nest-building behaviours, and reducing boredom, stress, injuries, and unwanted behaviours like tail biting.

However, enrichment items can harbour pathogens and contribute to the spread of disease if they are improperly used and managed. This abstract provides practical recommendations for providing enrichment to pigs while maintaining biosecurity standards.

Transferring enrichment between batches, rooms, or houses increases the risk of pathogen transmission

→Allocate items by batch and production phase. When reusing items, apply strict cleaning and disinfection protocols.

→Consider using degradable and/or edible organic materials, such as shredded paper or straw, which are consumed and/or are fully broken down in the pen, removing the need for transfer between batches.

Enrichment can accumulate organic matter, compromising hygiene

→Hang items at pig shoulder height or use side-mounted racks for loose materials to keep them off the floor.

→Rotating multiple types of enrichment over time within the same pen allows for regular cleaning and disinfection, while providing variety and novelty to keep pigs engaged.

Bringing enrichment onto the farm risks introducing outside pathogens

→Clean and disinfect all items before use and avoid using unsanitary or unknown-origin items such as old tires, wellies, and items from other farms.

Loose materials such as straw or hay are preferred by pigs but may carry a pathogen risk

→Source from suppliers or regions certified free of relevant pathogens (e.g., ASFV, PRRSV) and store properly to prevent pests and reduce the risk of mould.

Damaged or unsuitable enrichment can cause wounds, creating entry points for infection

→Inspect enrichment daily and replace damaged items promptly
- check for sharp edges, splinters, cracks, or protruding metal.

→Use durable, pig-safe enrichment such as commercially available rubber toys, jute sacks or rope, and loose materials.





Effective pig enrichment should be chewable, manipulable, and destructible, but it must also be sourced, maintained, and stored properly to ensure a strict hygienic environment.

Integrating enrichment into biosecurity protocols can help prevent potential problems.

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