



Professor Anna Valros



The tale of the Finnish pig tail - how to manage non-docked pigs?

Professor Anna Valros has a Master of Science in Zoology (1998), and a PhD in animal behaviour and welfare (2003) from the University of Helsinki, Finland. Since 2008 she has been appointed as Professor of Animal Welfare at the Department of Production Animal Medicine, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Helsinki. Her main research area is behaviour and welfare of pigs, with tail biting prevention and aetiology being one of her focuses. She has coordinated two international projects on tail biting in pigs, including the EU-ERAnet project FareWellDock. In her research, she has focused on issues such as understanding farmer perceptions, the mechanistic link between health and tail biting and scoring of tail biting at the abattoir. Professor Valros is an associate member of the European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine ((AWSEL) and an independent expert member of the EU Animal welfare platform. She has taken part in several EU-level initiatives on reducing the need for tail docking, including the TAILS-action coordinated by the European Commission and as a member of the Animal welfare platform subgroup on pig welfare.

Tail biting is a serious behavioral problem in pig production, causing impaired animal welfare and economic losses. In most countries the detrimental effects of tail biting are counteracted by docking pigs' tails. Finland is one of the few countries where tail docking in pigs is totally forbidden. The aim of this paper is to focus on features of pig production in Finland to understand how Finnish producers rear non-docked pigs. The way pigs are housed and managed in Finland is influenced by both European and national legislation. Several features of Finnish pig production might indeed have a preventive role regarding the tail biting risk: these include larger space allowances, partly slatted flooring, use of manipulable materials, good animal health status and meal feeding from long troughs. Finnish producers are motivated to rear non-docked pigs, which is possibly one of the most important prerequisites for success. Experiences from Finland show that even though tail biting is still a challenge, it is possible to rear non-docked pigs in intensive production. Potential positive side-effects of enhancing management and housing to facilitate the rearing of non-docked pigs include a good growth rate, a reduced need for antimicrobials and better animal welfare levels.