



## HEALTH

### Tail docking

For a variety of reasons pigs may bite each other's tails. This can lead to infection, abscesses in the spine, severe pain, lameness and carcase condemnation. Where other management options have proven ineffective, your veterinary surgeon may recommend tail docking as a method to help prevent tail biting. Where tail docking is recommended, its necessity must be reviewed regularly (quarterly) as part of the unit's Veterinary Health Plan and there must be a concerted effort to provide manipulable materials in all pens.

Equipment/info required		Personal safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrying container</li> <li>• Cauterising tail docker or clippers</li> <li>• Spare batteries/gas</li> <li>• Disinfectant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wire cleaning brush</li> <li>• Marker</li> <li>• Piglet holding container</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ear plugs (indoors)</li> <li>• Gloves</li> <li>• Dust mask</li> </ul>

### Preparation

- Ensure the operator is familiar with the manufacturer's instructions
- **Cauterising docker**
  - Check blades are clean and that they heat correctly
  - Check batteries are charged or that sufficient gas canisters are available
- **Clippers/pliers**
  - Clippers must be dedicated for this procedure and not used for teeth clipping as well
  - Ensure that they are sharp and clean
- Load equipment and materials into waist belt pouches or carrying container and proceed to farrowing area
- Ensure that the operator is physically separated from the sow.

### Outline of work

- Secure equipment container in a safe and convenient location at first farrowing pen or hut
- Collect all piglets into holding container
- Ensure that cauteriser blade is fully heated
- Pick up piglet by back leg above hock or around hips
- Hold tail steady
- Remove an appropriate length of the tail by gently squeezing docker handles



Tail docking equipment

- Cauterise straight across the tail; do not try to cut through as if with scissors, allow heat to cauterise
- Mark piglet and return to holding container
- If using clippers, disinfect between piglets
- Regularly check and remove debris using designated wire brush from cauterising blade and guide
- Repeat above steps for remainder of litter
- Proceed to next litter of piglets thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting equipment between litters
- Ensure all tails are docked to a uniform length within a unit; having a marker on the clipper to indicate the unit's standard tail docking length can be useful.



*Holding the tail steady*



*Do not try to cut through as if with scissors,  
instead allow heat to cauterise*

### Additional information

- Keep records of incidences of tail biting such that there is up to date evidence of the need to continue docking
- If tail biting continues amongst tail docked pigs additional advice and measures should be sought to help address the problem
- The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 state:
  - The procedure may only be carried out where measures to improve environmental conditions or management systems have first been taken to prevent tail-biting, but there is still evidence to show that injury to pigs' tails by biting has occurred
  - The method used must involve quick and complete severance of the tail
  - An anaesthetic and additional prolonged analgesia must be administered where the animal is aged 7 days or over.
- Most farm assurance schemes which permit tail docking specify that it should be carried out within the first three days of life.

### Reference documents

- Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Pigs
- The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007
- BPEX work instruction 8: Handling and restraining pigs.