

TACKLING VICE – Recognising, Recording and Retaliating

There is now a real drive for accurate on-farm recording of vice behaviours as the latest Red Tractor and RSPCA inspection standards come in. We are unable to issue derogations allowing tail docking without these records, so it's something we need to be implementing now in order to protect yourselves or your suppliers from losing the ability to dock altogether or incurring fines. While the process of recording will be individual to each farm and likely to be tailored over time, here are ideas to start thinking about on your own farm to get into a routine of keeping track of any issues and outbreaks.

T Tail docking doesn't always prevent the 'disease' entirely but aims to reduce the 'symptoms'. The root *cause* of tail biting is not the length of a pig's tail, and this is where a skilled stockperson comes in; identifying reasons for an incident of tail biting is not always possible, but in order to recognise patterns (or lack thereof) it's important that we think about *why* vice might be occurring. Recognising risk factors helps us to prevent future outbreaks, and logging what works and what doesn't as a preventative or corrective measure helps us to limit damage.

A **Aims of recording**

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1. Identify patterns on your own farm:
 - Does it appear to be seasonal or weather related?
 - Does it occur at a predictable time or age?
 - Is it more prevalent in certain pens or buildings?
 - Is it associated with particular sources or genetic lines?
 - Are there any predisposing factors?
 - Are there any behaviours which predict an outbreak beginning?
 2. Identify ways to prevent outbreaks in future.
 3. Identify effective ways to minimise impact and spread if it occurs.

S **What we need to know**

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1. Basic details such as number and location of bitten pigs, age, if they're split sexed, length of tails.
 2. Presence of early warning signs (agitated/restless, ear/body lesions, fight marks, tails flat, tail sucking).
 3. Risk/causative factors identified.
 4. Interventions applied and response.
 5. Treatment given.
 6. Outcome – **mortality as a consequence** of tail biting (severity, infection, spread to joints), recovery rates, increase or decrease in incidence.

P The below table highlights some common risk factors involved in vice, and some corrective actions you can consider taking. This is by no means exhaustive, and it may pay to come up with your own key for filling in a recording form.

CAUSATIVE FACTOR	EXPLANATION/CORRECTIVE ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncomfortable stocking density 	Reduce (or in some cases increase) stocking density.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-optimal straw (mouldy, dusty, damp) • Insufficient clean/dry bedding • High ammonia level 	Clean out pen/arc and provide fresh, high quality bedding if appropriate to system. Slurry management under slats.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health problems 	Consult vet, treat individuals, separate poor pigs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed availability 	Check feed spaces aren't blocked, that they are reachable and that there are enough.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed palatability/change in feed 	Check feed components and supply haven't changed. Acid, minerals or medication additives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water availability • Water palatability 	Check height of drinkers, number available, temperature and flow rate. Are the drinkers/bowls/troughs and pipes clean? Addition of acid, cleaner or medication can affect palatability.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor ventilation • Draught (continuous or intermittent) • Cold/hot • High humidity • Extreme weather 	Alter ventilation if possible. Block draughts – evaluate at pig level. Heat – provide wallows, sprinklers, shade etc. Cold – kenneling, bedding, insulation, enough pigs in a pen.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light 	Check pigs can escape direct sunlight. Provide at least 8 hours/day of minimum 40 lux light if indoors, but pigs must also have a 'night'.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving/mixing pigs 	This is a major stressor – each time pigs are moved/mixed they lose 7 days' growth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate enrichment 	Be inventive and provide variety!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate staff 	Are there enough people on farm to pick up problems quickly and to get an outbreak under control?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in source/genetics 	

Fundamentals of treatment

1. **Separation** – removal of biter or bitten pigs. This will depend on how many there are, how severe, and what hospital accommodation is available.
2. **Hygiene** – a wound will never heal in a wet or dirty environment. Clean, dry bedding is imperative, and aluminium or antibiotic spray should be used regularly to dry the wound.
3. **Antibiotics** – all but the most minor grazes must be treated with antibiotics. The tail is a direct route into the spine, and if left untreated infection can spread all over the body, leading to mortality or total condemnations at slaughter. Your vet can advise on appropriate treatment.
4. **Anti-inflammatory pain relief** – this is an extremely painful condition, given the proximity to the spinal cord and nerves, and an anti-inflammatory will aid recovery (most use Metacam).
5. **Repellent spray or other topical deterrents** – e.g. Stockton Blue, Tailguard, Interdor etc.

Available resources

AHDB WebHAT is a resource that can be drawn on to provide evidence to support tail docking derogations. There is a risk report tool available online, and producers can order free A3 laminated posters showing the early warning signs of tail biting, which are useful to help train stockpeople and new staff. Email comms@ahdb.org.uk to request posters.

GVG have a few different prototypes for recording sheets – we'd be very keen to hear your ideas, and feedback on what would be most useful to you. I would encourage you to come up with your own to include the relevant information individual to your farm and to create the easiest system for yourselves, but we are more than happy to assist or provide example forms.

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