



Information for Freedom Food Pig producers on Standards H 7.2-7.4: requests for permission to tail dock, tooth clip and nose ring, and for the use of Improvac[®]

As stated in Standards H 7.2-7.4, tail docking, tooth clipping and nose ringing must only be carried out under exceptional circumstances, never routinely. H 7.15 allows Improvac[®] to be used on male pigs with prior approval from the RSPCA. Requests to carry out these procedures must be made annually in writing to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department (for contact details please see below). The following information is intended to give further guidance on what the request should contain, in order to aid the RSPCA Farm Animals Department in making their decision.

Tail docking

The request for permission to tail dock must include:

- 1) welfare-related reasons for the request. For example, the finishing unit that the piglets are destined for may have experienced previous outbreaks of tail biting and it may be the opinion of the veterinary surgeon that the risk of further outbreaks occurring remains high. In such cases, an indication of why this might be needed. If the reason for the request is that the finishing unit is requesting tail docked pigs, then the finishing unit must write to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department with their reasons for the request.
- 2) an indication of the severity of tail biting on the unit e.g. numbers of pigs involved, frequency of outbreaks.
- 3) detail of what has previously been done to try and alleviate the problem through other means, including when this was undertaken, e.g. additional straw or similar manipulable materials have been added, the diet has been re-evaluated/changed, the number of pigs each stock-keeper has to look after has been reduced, stocking density has been reduced, available feed space has been increased, consideration has been given to the use of other breeds etc.
- 4) details of the unit's tail docking policy review e.g. has the producer tried receiving a batch of pigs that were not tail docked? If so, what happened?
- 5) an indication of how much of the tail would be removed and why, should permission be granted (see H 7.7 which states that if permission is granted a minimum of 6cm must be left at the time of docking).
- 6) information on who would undertake the docking should permission be granted, and their level of competence/training received.

Failure to provide all the information required may result in permission not being granted and /or a delay in a decision being made. A pro forma is available on the RSPCA website which allows all the necessary information to be captured. Please note that H 7.8 prohibits tail docking for free range pigs.

Tooth Clipping

The request for permission to tooth clip must include the welfare-related reasons for the request, along with information on the number of instances of facial scarring and udder damage, including the number of piglets affected. In terms of reasons, some veterinarians cite the possibility of piglets inflicting damaging bites to one another, which could create a route for infection. Others are concerned about piglets damaging the sow's teats and the possibility of the sow then rejecting the litter or subsequent litters. Any information as to whether the producer has tried leaving the teeth intact, and any adverse or positive effects that resulted from this would be useful, as would information as to whether the producer has tried clipping only the litter of first parity sows (who would be most likely to react negatively to subsequent litters if damaged by the first litter). Information as to the experience of tooth grinding if this has been attempted would also be relevant. It should be noted that as outlined in the Information Box after Standard H 7.2, the use of tooth grinding in place of clipping is encouraged.

Nose ringing

The request for permission to nose ring must include the welfare-related reasons for the request. For example, some producers feel that unringed sows will dig holes in the ground, which could potentially fill with water and lead to drowning of piglets. Other reasons may include details of the outcome when sows were left unringed e.g. was piglet mortality higher? Does the producer have any data relating to this?

In all cases, for tooth clipping, nose ringing and tail docking, the reasons for the request must be specific to the unit in question and the need to carry out the procedure must be reviewed with the unit's veterinary surgeon at the quarterly veterinary visits.

Improvac[®]

The request for permission to use Improvac[®] on male pigs must include welfare-related reasons.

Contact details for the Farm Animals Department:

Farm-animals@rspca.org.uk

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Farm Animals Department – September 2017