



TEAGASC PHD WALSH FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY

“Strategies to reduce the risk of tail biting in pigs managed on slatted floors”

Ref: 2015070

Background

Pigs are highly motivated to perform exploratory behaviours. In commercial facilities this behaviour is often directed towards other pigs, particularly in times of stress. This results in tail-biting, one of the most serious health, **welfare and production problems in pig production**. **Docking of pigs’ tails is used as a control mechanism**, yet even so, tail lesions due to biting are present in up to 70% of pigs. Moreover, routine tail-docking is forbidden in the EU. Manipulable environmental enrichment reduces the amount and severity of tail-biting, and is a legal requirement. However, as well as being effective at reducing tail lesions, materials should be sustainable with regard to cost and suitability for the farm management system they are used in. For instance, loose straw is extremely effective as enrichment, but is costly, and it could also affect slurry management. The objective of this PhD project is to investigate strategies to reduce the risk of tail biting that can be quickly and easily adopted in slatted systems. The manipulable materials investigated will include organic (straw and wood) and non-organic (e.g. rubber floor toy) options, as well as other strategies identified by the student. The student will initially investigate the type of wood appropriate for different ages of tail docked pigs, followed by an experiment to investigate the most effective type, combined with straw blocks, on pigs with different tail lengths. They will then investigate the level of access to material that is needed; efficacy of a material is likely dependent on the level of access that the pigs have. Access can be adjusted by altering the amount of enrichment provided, or by changing the design of the pen. The ultimate measures of interest are the amount of tail damage that occurs in each scenario, as well as proxy measures of material effectiveness such as observed pig directed behaviour and the time taken for substrates to be depleted. The student will also use physical and behavioural measures to assess pig health and welfare from weaning through to slaughter. Finally, advice and guidelines for reducing tail biting will be prepared, and results will be disseminated effectively to enable prompt adoption by stakeholders.

Requirements

Applicants should have an Honours degree (1H or 2H1) or a Masters in Agricultural Science, Veterinary Science or other relevant discipline. Final year undergraduate students likely to achieve these degree classifications are also eligible to apply and may be awarded the PhD subject to the classification being achieved. A full driving licence would be a distinct advantage. The successful candidate should be self-motivated and will be expected to work on animal trials as well as in the laboratory.

Award

The PhD Fellowship is a joint research project between Teagasc, Moorepark, **Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC)** and University of Edinburgh. The student will be based at the Teagasc Research Centre at Moorepark Fermoy, Co. Cork and will be registered at University of Edinburgh. The student may be required to undertake periods of trial work at commercial pig farms, taught course work at SRUC/Edinburgh, and laboratory work at other locations if deemed necessary during the project. This PhD project is part funded by the Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marines Competitive **research programmes**. **This studentship is for 4 years and an allowance of €22,000 per annum is available**. This allowance is intended to cover both student maintenance and university fees.

Application Procedure

Submit an electronic copy of a Curriculum Vitae (to include the names and contact details of two referees) and a cover letter to:

- Dr **Keelin O’Driscoll**, Teagasc, Pig Production Development Dept., Animal & Grassland Research & Innovation Centre, Fermoy, Co. Cork, Ireland (keelin.odriscoll@teagasc.ie)

Closing date 26 June 2015