

# Real Welfare update report (2018–2020)



PORK

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## Acknowledgements

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# Summary

In the seven years since the instigation of the Real Welfare Scheme (2013–2019), over 13 million pigs have been individually assessed by specially trained vets, providing a credible, benchmarked level of welfare at both an industry and an individual farm level. While there is always more to do, the evidence has shown, on average, the poorest performing farms have improved during this period. A summary of the overall improvements can be found below.

- Hospital – only 0.05% of pigs needed hospitalisation, showing that the majority of farmers identify and provide appropriate care (for example, moving to a hospital pen) for affected pigs
- Lameness – only 0.15% of pigs were lame, showing that either levels of lameness on farms are low or that the majority of farmers identify and provide appropriate care (for example, moving to a hospital pen) for affected pigs
- Tail damage – 0.15% of pigs had severe tail damage and 72% of pigs were docked. While this figure compares favourably to other parts of the world where tail docking is permitted, the pig industry is seeking to reduce the need for tail docking. Real Welfare provides an evidence base that the industry can work from and measure positive change in the future
- Body marks – only 0.18% of pigs had severe body marks, showing that farmers deal well with these pigs, and the overall level is low
- Environmental enrichment – the average enrichment ratio per pen was 0.52, showing there is scope for improvement, as enrichment is, on average, only slightly preferred to pen mates and pen fittings. For 1% of pigs, no enrichment was seen; this figure shows that improvements must be made, to comply with legislation
- The findings show that the vast majority of farms are either addressing welfare issues or already have them under control
- Prevalence of the main welfare outcomes shows a decreasing trend over time, except for severe tail lesions (in which this decreasing trend is not maintained in the last couple of years). At the same time, there is a slight increasing trend for the enrichment use ratio, which is desirable. However, there is room for improvement, particularly in reducing tail damage and further increasing enrichment use

- Seasonal effects were found to influence the prevalence of all five of the welfare outcomes, and tended to vary according to the welfare outcome that was considered. Severe tail lesions were more prevalent in autumn and spring, corresponding with greater temperature fluctuations. Higher enrichment use ratio was observed in autumn and winter, possibly associated with greater supplies of bedding
- While the percentage of pigs with a welfare issue could be high in individual pens, the mean prevalence of the different welfare outcomes overall was low. This confirms that where issues are found during an assessment, they are localised and not uniform across a farm. They also change over time
- This assessment of Real Welfare outcomes shows the scheme provides a positive impact, especially in providing good support to decrease lameness, severe body marks and improve hospital pen management

## Introduction

The Real Welfare scheme is a self-funded partnership approach to measuring pig welfare. It was developed in response to the pig industry's need for strong, science-based evidence to demonstrate where its husbandry standards were strong and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement. On an industry level, this is the largest database of its kind in measuring pig welfare outcomes, and it provides a valuable source of information to help drive further improvements in the industry.

Real Welfare involves on-farm assessments of finisher pig welfare, using a set of five objectives and repeatable measures. The standardised data from these assessments provides information regarding on-farm welfare, as well as trends both between farms and over time.

### Five measures

Four measures are routinely assessed on pigs over 50 kg. The fifth measure, environmental enrichment, is optional, although the type of enrichment found in pens must be recorded.

- Hospital pigs (pigs that would benefit from removal to a hospital pen)
- Lameness
- Tail damage
- Body marks
- Environmental enrichment use

Real Welfare is also used to collect information on other variables, such as feeding practice, pen variables and whether tails are docked or undocked.

Real Welfare assessments on samples of finisher pigs have been a requirement of the Red Tractor Pigs Scheme since April 2013. The scheme also requires that the vets conducting the assessments have undergone specific training on the protocol. Since August 2016, Real Welfare assessments were also required for farms that finish pigs under the Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) Pigs Assurance Scheme, bringing the coverage of Real Welfare to approximately 95% of all pigs produced in the UK.

### Assessments

Real Welfare assessments are carried out by veterinary surgeons who are members of the Pig Veterinary Society, and have been trained to assess these welfare outcomes according to a standardised protocol. The assessments are usually carried out as part of the quarterly veterinary visits, and take place 2–4 times a year. A sample of pigs, from a range of pens, is assessed on each visit. Real Welfare outcomes are reported back to the producers as a rolling total, combining all assessments from the previous 365 days. These reports of the results of Real Welfare assessments also allow farmers to benchmark their welfare outcomes against other farms.

Welfare outcome assessments are used, to:

- Assess the level of welfare achieved for an individual animal, a pen of animals, a farm building or a farm/unit
- Identify and monitor welfare problems and solutions on a farm
- Strengthen farm management through assessment, feedback from vets and benchmarking
- Provide more reliable and direct assurance of animal welfare, including to retailers and consumers

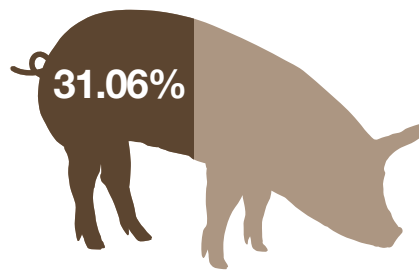
Welfare assessment outcomes are then discussed between the veterinarian and the farmer, which helps identify any areas for improvement and action; these are recorded in the farm's Veterinary Health Plan.

The implementation of these recommendations is audited annually. In this way, Real Welfare provides an in-built improvement method to help move the industry forward continuously.

## Vital statistics

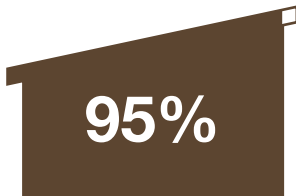
**13,678,660**

pigs were assessed individually over the last 7 years of the scheme using the Real Welfare protocol; this included 495,592 pigs from Scottish farms.



This covers all Red Tractor and Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) farms that raise pigs for slaughter, equating to

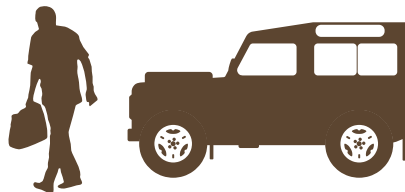
of all the pigs present on these farms on the day of the assessment were assessed as part of the Real Welfare scheme by veterinarians from



of all commercially raised pigs in the UK.

**99**

different vet practices.



## Welfare outcomes

The following pages describe the welfare outcomes, as measured since the scheme's inception in April 2013, until the end of December 2019. The data were collected on English (since 2013) and Scottish (since 2016) farms.

### Hospital pigs

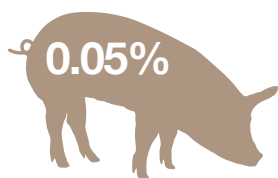
#### Scope

This measure is assessed on all pigs in a representative number of pens, excluding those designated as 'hospital pens'.

#### Definition

Any pig that would benefit from removal to hospital accommodation.

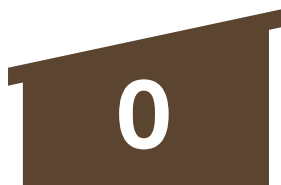
Of these pigs not already in hospital pens:



On average

**5 out of 10,000**

pigs needed hospitalisation



On more than 75% of farms

**no pigs needed hospitalisation**

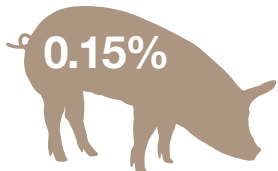
## Lameness

### Scope

This measure is assessed on all pigs in a representative number of pens, excluding those pens designated as hospital pens.

### Definition

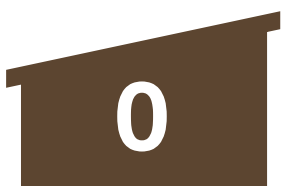
Any pig that, when standing, will not bear full weight on the affected limb and/or appears to be standing on its toes. When moving, there is a shortened stride with minimum or no weight-bearing on the affected limb and a swagger of the hindquarters. The pig may still be able to trot and gallop. This does not include pigs that are only showing stiffness or uneven gait.



On average

**15 out of 10,000**

non-hospitalised pigs were lame



On more than 75% of farms there were

**no non-hospitalised lame pigs**

## Tail damage

### Scope

This measure is assessed on a sample of pigs, in a representative number of pens, excluding those pens designated as hospital pens. Recording of mild tail damage is optional (since November 2013).

### Severe tail damage

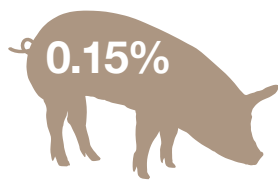
Recorded as severe if at least a proportion of the tail has been removed (by biting), the tail is swollen or held oddly, scab covering whole tip. By definition, severe tail damage can never be obscured by dirt.

## Mild tail damage

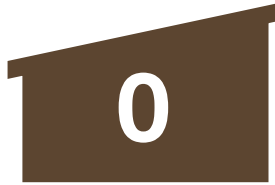
Not reported in this update (for definition, please see [Real Welfare Baseline Report: 2013–2016](#)).

# 7,112,777

non-hospitalised pigs were assessed for severe tail damage



On average, 15 out of 10,000 pigs (0.15%) had severe tail damage



More than 75% of farms had no pigs with severe tail damage

## 24%

At least 24% of pigs had undocked tails

## 72%

72% of pigs had their tails docked

## 4%

The remaining 4% of pigs were kept in pens with mixed tail lengths

## Body marks

### Scope

This measure is assessed on a sample of pigs, in a representative number of pens, excluding those pens designated as hospital pens. Recording of mild body marks is optional (since November 2013), and not reported in this update.

### Severe body marks

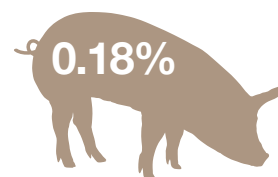
Recorded as severe if a mark is larger than 5x5 cm diameter, if the mark extends into deeper layers of the skin or if marks over a large percentage (>25%) of the skin. If a pig has both mild and severe body marks, it is recorded as severe only.

### Mild body marks

Not reported in this update (for definition, please see [Real Welfare Baseline Report: 2013–2016](#)).

# 7,110,608

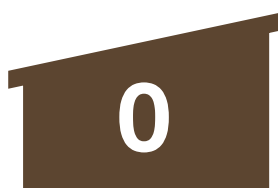
non-hospitalised pigs were assessed for severe tail damage



On average

## 18 out of 10,000

pigs had severe body marks



More than 75% of farms

## had no pigs with severe body marks

## Environmental enrichment

### Scope

This measure is assessed on all pigs in a representative number of pens, excluding those pens designated as hospital pens. This measure has been optional since October 2013.

### Definition

The type of environmental enrichment was reported as substrate ('straw' or 'other substrate') and/or object ('chain', 'plastic' or 'other object'). The quantity of straw was further classified as restricted, low, medium or deep. Where no enrichment was seen on farm at the time of assessment, it was recorded as 'none seen'.

### Assessment of use of environmental enrichment

The enrichment use is expressed as a ratio and is calculated as:

$$\frac{A}{A+B}$$

Where:

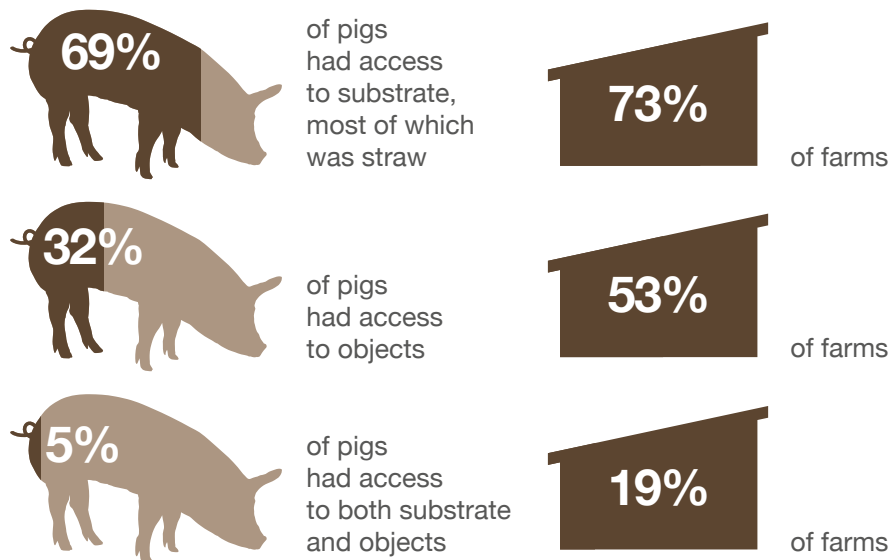
**A** = Number of standing or sitting pigs investigating a manipulable material, i.e. substrate or toy provided as enrichment.

**B** = Number of standing or sitting pigs manipulating other pigs, pen fittings, pen floor or muck. Include if the snout/mouth is in contact with any part of another pig.

The average enrichment ratio per pen was 0.52\*.

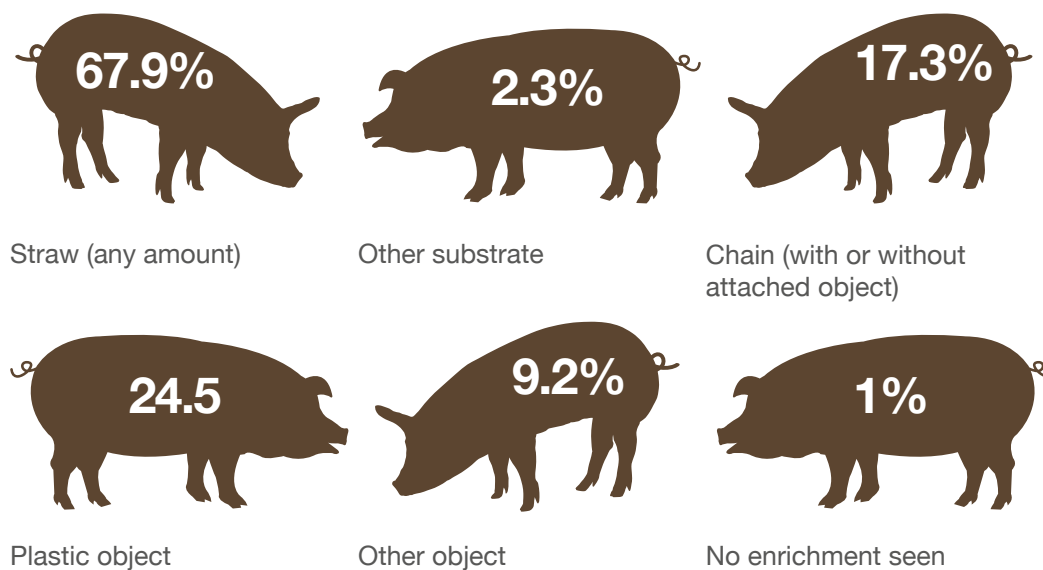
\*Enrichment ratio explained

Any value over 0.5 suggests that pigs are displaying a preference to use the enrichments provided; 0.5 indicates the provided enrichments are equal in preference to pen mates or pen fittings, so there is scope for improvement in providing enrichments; values below 0.5 suggest the pigs are displaying a preference to investigate other pen mates or fittings, and so consideration may need to be given to introducing more effective enrichment materials.



This excludes assessments where no enrichment was recorded on the assessment form.

Percentage of pigs that had access to at least one of the following (based on a sub-sample of pigs):



## Making progress

### Trends in prevalence of welfare outcomes over time

The mean prevalence of the four main welfare outcomes was low. Overall, all measures of physical injuries, except tail damage, decreased over the years during which Real Welfare has been operation. This may be a consequence of greater attention being paid to these outcomes and motivation to improve, or it may be because farmers are getting better at moving pigs to hospital pens when needed. However, regardless of the underlying reason, the figures demonstrate an improvement to the welfare of individual animals in the British pig herd. Equally, the increased use of some forms of enrichment may have had an influence, although further analysis of data is required to be able to draw conclusions about the relationship between the two.

### Seasonal variation

Seasonal effects were found to influence the prevalence of all five of the welfare outcomes, but the effect differed according to the welfare outcome that was considered. The proportion of pigs requiring hospitalisation was significantly higher in autumn and winter compared with spring. The proportion of lame pigs was significantly higher in winter compared with summer. The proportion of pigs with severe tail lesions was significantly higher in spring and autumn compared with summer and winter; corresponding to times with greater temperature fluctuations. The proportion of pigs with severe body marks was significantly lower in autumn compared with spring. Significantly higher enrichment use ratios were observed in autumn and winter, possibly associated with greater supplies of bedding at these times.



## Conclusion

The objective of this report was to assess the welfare of pigs in commercial pig finishing enterprises in the UK (excluding hospital pens) through five animal-based measures, and to assess the changes over time and season of these measures. The report also assessed the types and usage by pigs of environmental enrichment and the percentage of tail-docked pigs.

The mean prevalence of the different welfare outcomes was low. The lowest percentage was for pigs requiring hospitalisation, and the highest percentage for severe body marks. While the percentage of pigs with a welfare issue could be high in individual pens, the maximum value of the percentage of pigs with welfare issues for the annual rolling average at farm level was much lower. This confirms that where issues are found during an assessment, they are localised and not uniform across a farm. They also change over time.

Considering the low percentage of all the welfare outcomes in the most recent years of the Real Welfare Scheme, we could expect a stabilisation in the prevalence of these outcomes, as significant further reductions and a complete absence of welfare issues would be unrealistic. This assessment of Real Welfare outcomes shows the scheme provides a positive impact, especially in offering good support to decrease lameness, severe body marks and improve hospital pen management. Although the other welfare outcomes may be influenced by alternative environmental factors, Real Welfare outcomes suggest that the monitoring of these welfare indicators is worthwhile and can help producers and vets monitor and respond to trends on farm. It is known that benchmarking of health and welfare measures can lead to greater awareness and motivation to improve, but analysis of the Real Welfare data suggests that this is not uniform for all welfare outcomes; especially for severe tail lesions. Tail biting is a complex, multifactorial issue that needs a considerable amount of information to disentangle its interwoven risk factors. The Real Welfare assessments are enabling the building of a tailored data set, sufficient to allow the industry make further progress in this area.

The Real Welfare assessment scheme builds on the partnership between farmers and veterinary surgeons, providing an excellent basis from which to drive, and evidence, the British pig industry's commitment and achievements in continuous improvement in pig welfare.



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