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The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
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Scratch that itch: Farrowing crate scratching enrichment for sows

RK Pritchett*[†§], BN Gaskill[‡], MA Erasmus[‡], JS Radcliffe[‡] and DC Lay Jr[§]

[†] 270 South Russell Street, West Lafayette, IN 47906, USA
[‡] Department of Animal Sciences, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA
[§] USDA ARS, Livestock Behavior Research Unit, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA
* Contact for correspondence: smit1934@purdue.edu

Abstract

*Developing effective enrichments is important for improving pig (*Sus scrofa*) welfare as it increases species-specific behaviours, decreases abnormal behaviours, and increases time active. However, few enrichments are available for sows in farrowing crates. Pigs are often observed to scratch, or rub against objects, however enrichments designed to provide a scratching outlet have never been tested in sows. We examined the behaviour and welfare of sows in farrowing crates when they were presented with one of two types of scratch-pad enrichment. Sows (n = 18) of parities two (P2) and three (P3) were housed for 25 days and assigned no enrichment (Control) or a scratch-pad made of plastic mats (Plastic) or coir fibre mats (Fibre). Parity two Plastic sows scratched for a longer total duration than P2 and P3 Fibre sows, P3 Plastic sows, and P2 Control sows. Parity two Plastic sows also displayed scratching bouts more frequently than all except P3 Control sows. There were no body lesion differences between treatments. Abnormal behaviour and proportion of time spent in different postures also did not differ between treatments. Plastic scratch-pads may be a suitable enrichment for farrowing crates as they increased the natural behaviour of scratching. More research is needed to refine the scratch-pad design and measure motivation before it can be concluded that scratch-pads are a successful enrichment that should be implemented on-farm.*

Keywords: *animal behaviour, animal welfare, environmental enrichment, farrowing crate, scratching, swine*