

Summary: Tooth Resection

The Problem

Piglets are born with sharp needle teeth, which are cut or ground shortly after birth to prevent damage to the sow's udder and piglets' faces during lactation. Routine tooth resection (tooth grinding or clipping) is not permitted by EU legislation and teeth-clipping is banned in some countries (Germany, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland).

Tooth clipping

Tooth clipping is painful and can cause injury to teeth or gums, and distress indicated by teeth champing. Suckling ability, growth rate and play behaviour are also affected. Additionally, damage to a sow's udder may actually be caused by her hind limbs, as opposed to her litter, particularly in farrowing crates. One study found litters with intact teeth caused more lesions than teeth-clipped litters around day 8 of lactation, but there was no difference in damage observed by days 15 and 27. Tooth clipping does not improve productivity and can reduce weight gain, particularly in smaller piglets.



Tooth grinding

Tooth grinding may be better for welfare than clipping, but research is currently inconclusive and it depends on the amount of tooth ground. Grinding causes fewer lesions to piglets' teeth than clipping, but still causes tooth injuries, which vary in severity and can reduce piglet growth. Tooth grinding was found to have no effect on sow udder lesions or piglet body skin lesions by day 27 of lactation. Tooth grinding takes longer than clipping and so causes greater handling stress (shown by an increase in the stress hormone cortisol), but is determined by the amount ground. Grinding just the tip of the tooth does not expose the sensitive pulp, but can lead to more skin lesions. Both teeth clipping and grinding cause teeth lesions which are painful and cause health disorders. When tooth resection is completely unavoidable, grinding should be chosen over clipping, as it results in fewer lesions.

The Solution

Avoiding Tooth Resection



Breeding sows with smaller litters, selecting sows with a high numbers of teats and managing sow feeding so that they produce sufficient milk reduces competition between piglets and facial scarring. Providing enough pen space so the sow can move freely also reduces aggression between piglets. Crowded, barren conditions cause piglets to spend longer interacting with the sow rather than the environment. Providing a spacious, stimulating environment (e.g. with deep straw) reduces aggression. Free farrowing is recommended as confinement prevents successful nursing by the sow, which increases the time piglets spend at the sow's teats and could lead to more lesions. Tooth resection is unnecessary in outdoor systems due to the space and bedding provided.

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<http://www.compassioninfoodbusiness.com/media/5823238/tooth-resection.pdf>