



**Ask the  
VMD**

Leon Riegel



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**Bitting nails over tails**  
**A reader asks:**  
 Last February I put hogs in my new confinement building for the first time. Since I'm a purebred breeder, I don't cut tails on my pigs. This Fall I've had a problem with tail biting and infection.

I've tried throwing tires, chains, etc. in the pens, but the only thing that seems to work is moving them to my old barn where the pens are bedded. Any suggestions? Right now I have more pigs in my old barn than in my new confinement building.

**Dr. Trayer comments:**  
 When you have a problem initiated by a new building such as

this one, you need to check to see exactly what has been changed.

One area that is often a problem when going from an old to a new building is a drastic space requirement change for the animals. If you reduce the square feet per animal there is an increased tendency for tail biting, etc.

There are many tables written which list the basic space recommendations for pigs — these may vary depending on the source.

Some building sales representatives may short cut the recommended space requirements in order to sell a building for less cost. In the long run, however,

problems may be increased

**Basic recommendations are:**  
 In the 60-100 pound range, there should be a 5 square feet of flooring:

In the 150 pound to market weight range, there should be 8 square feet of floor space per animal

These space requirements vary depending on whether the building calls for slatted floors, whether it is partial open-front, etc.

Along with adequate floor space, you should check feeder space. Recommendations call for one feeder space for each four animals. If there is less space, a

pig is going to start biting tails so he can eat.

Another thing to check is that the ventilation system is circulating the air properly, gases and dust are being removed, and temperature variations are not drastic. To check this out, a smoke test of the building can be done to see just what the ventilation pattern is. Since yours is a fairly new building, hopefully the ventilation will be in balance.

And, be sure not to let the feed get old. If you are feeding high moisture corn, particularly in hot, humid weather, be sure it doesn't become stale and rancid. Along with that, an adequate supply of fresh water is vital. There should be at least one watering cup or nipple for every 20 pigs in a pen situation.

When there are more than 27 pigs in a pen, the normal pecking order is in a state of flux. The pigs cannot remember who the 'boss hog' is, so they are constantly fighting to reestablish a peck order (dominance).

Looking at the health side of tail biting, make sure there is no parasite problem, such as lice or mange. These parasites can set the stage for primarily ear biting, but can induce tail biting.

In the farrowing room, make sure the needle teeth are being cut properly — not shattered or with

sharp teeth being missed. One animal with a sharp tooth can start a 'nice' tail biting battle.

Individual animals with sharp needle teeth can be identified in the pen because these are generally the two or three pigs doing all the tail biting. If this situation is evident, remove these animals from the pen and see if the problem is corrected.

You should also check the adequacy of the iron supply in the feed ration and adjust it accordingly.

Since the old barn with straw seems to be working out, it would appear a nutritional cause is coming into play. A feed analysis would throw light on any deficiencies.


If these check points turn up in the clear, further studying of the situation is needed.



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