

Research Shows Temperament Influences Sow Productivity, Meat Quality

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CANADA - Research conducted by the Prairie Swine Centre shows the temperament of the sow can dramatically impact the productive performance of the breeding herd, Bruce Cochrane writes.

As part of multi-institutional, multi-disciplinary research initiative being conducted on behalf of Swine Innovation Porc, scientists with the Prairie Swine Centre have been examining the role of temperament in contributing to sow lameness and longevity.

The work focuses on stress response in pigs, how they respond on the farm to handling and meat quality.

Dr Jenifer Brown, a research scientist ethology with the Prairie Swine Centre, told those on hand last week in Winnipeg for a sow lameness, longevity and temperament workshop researchers found significant effects of these temperament traits on the farm, how that influenced their handling response and on meat quality.

Dr Jenifer Brown-Prairie Swine Centre

Studies on temperament are still in their early stages but certainly everyone would recognize that when we're managing animals in groups that aggression is one of the main traits that we're concerned about.

Some geneticists have suggested that, with our competitive management systems, we've been selecting for more aggressive animals because these are often the ones that are first to the feeder and are pushing other animals away from the feeder so inadvertently we may have selected for traits that are not very conducive to good social behavior within the herd.

If we can focus on these traits and identify the more positive traits we can definitely improve our chances of getting good consistent production across the herd.

Dr Brown notes some animals are more fearful, some are more active versus more passive and these traits are of interest because they can influence the animal's stress response, how they handle when being moved onto trucks, aggression traits and maternal characteristics.

She says, when managing sows in groups, temperament becomes even more important.

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