

Improved Slatted Floor Design Expected to Improve Sow Comfort

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CANADA - Researchers with the University of Manitoba hope to improve sow health and comfort by improving the design of slatted floors used in sow barns, writes Bruce Cochrane.

As part of research being conducted in partnership with Swine Innovation Porc to develop tools to assist in transitioning to group sow housing, scientists with the University of Manitoba are evaluating new designs for slatted flooring, the concrete flooring that allows liquid manure to flow through the floor and into the manure pits.

Dr Laurie Connor, the head of the University of Manitoba's Animal Science Department, explains if the gap between the slats is too wide the sows can get their feet caught, twist ankles or injure their claws.

Dr Laurie Connor-University of Manitoba:

This particular research is actually looking at how can we optimise the width of the concrete slat and the amount of gap between those slats, so that the sow can move comfortably, minimise risk to her and her footing but also allow for ease of manure movement through that slat.

We've determined what appears to be the slat width and the gap between those slats that seems to have the least impact on the actual movement of the sow.

We now are starting a study that actually has this in pens where we can follow sows through their gestation period from five weeks of pregnancy through to farrowing and look at various indicators of sow comfort and behaviour; very specifically look at their feet over time, if they're developing lesions, getting claws caught, lameness and we're also looking at aspects of dunging, manure removal through those slats and air quality.

Dr Connor says information gathered through this work will be used by flooring manufacturers and those who are using concrete flooring.

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