Female pigs do not get bullied when penned together with entire male pigs during the fattening period

Background

- Fattening of entire male pigs is a promising alternative to castration
- More frequent agonistic and mounting behaviour of entire males might influence health and welfare status of female pigs in mixed-sex groups

Research question

- Is health and welfare of female pigs impaired when penned together with entire male pigs under organic housing conditions?

Results

- Entire males showed more agonistic interactions and mounting than castrated males.
- Entire males performed 71% of head knocks and bites towards other males while castrated males interacted 47% with males and 53% with females.
- There was no effect of group composition on skin lesions of female pigs.

Conclusion

- Welfare of females was not affected by group compositions with entire or castrated males.

Animals and methods

- 241 pigs on a commercial organic farm
- Two different treatments (12 groups with 20 pigs each):
  - EF (entire males and females)
  - CF (castrated males and females)
- Direct observations of skin lesions and lameness on 5 days
- 2.5 h video observations on 5 days of 10 individually marked male focal animals per group: Agonistic and mounting behaviour
- Slaughtered with Ø 92 kg carcass weight
- Statistical analyses with linear mixed effect models

Details in Holinger et al. (2015) Group composition for fattening entire male pigs under enriched housing conditions—Influences on behaviour, injuries and boar taint compounds. Appl. Anim. Behav. Sci. 165, 47-56

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