The development of ingestive and social behavior of piglets under confinement and outdoors

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Objectives

- To compare the behavior of F1 (Landrace x Large White) x MS60 lactating litters raised under two different husbandry systems.

Methodology

- Behavioral observations were done every 3 days from the 6th until the 24th day after birth.
- Husbandry System 1: Confinement - conventional maternity crates (10 litters).
- Husbandry System 2: Outdoor paddocks (400m²) with access to shade, pasture and a hut (11 litters).

Results

- Outdoor piglets presented a higher frequency of ingestive behaviors (P=0.0002) and suckling (P=0.013), spent more time drinking water (P=0.0006), and carried out more play behavior (P<0.0001).
- Confined piglets were more frequently observed sleeping (P=0.036) and interacting with littermates (P=0.006), whereas total frequency of social interactions was half the amount observed in outdoor litters.
- There was a positive relationship between eating and drinking in both systems (P<0.01; r²=0.35), and a negative relationship between suckling and rooting for outdoors piglets (P<0.01; r²=0.44).
- Within the outdoor litters, piglets that spent more time away from the sow grazed more (P=0.002), interacted more both with littermates (P=0.04) and with non-littermates (P=0.001), than those that spent less time away from the sow.

Conclusions

- The outdoor system seems to have allowed piglets a higher degree of independence from the mother, stimulating foraging, exploration and social behaviors.
- Piglets with increased independence may be better able to handle weaning.