

# Pig Aggression

## Fact Sheet



### Why is aggression important?

When unfamiliar pigs are grouped together they fight to establish dominance relationships. This natural behaviour can, under farm conditions, escalate to the extent where health and productivity are affected. Aggression increases **stress**, causes skin **lesions** and can result in **injury** and **reduced immunity and growth**.



### Signs of extreme aggression

- Newly mixed pigs will show some skin lesions (photo). Every lesion is the result of a bite. **Patches of lesions can signify around 50-100 bites**. This goes together with high levels of exhaustion.
- Aggression should subside around 24h after regrouping. **Lameness and death** indicate very extreme aggression (given that flooring is appropriate).
- In stable groups aggression should be minimal as long as access to feed and water is adequate. Recently, **cases of deaths** due to aggression in stable groups seem to be increasing. If you encounter repeated issues with this then please contact SRUC (details below), as we are investigating the causes of this.



*Moderate lesions*

### When to take action

It is advised to take preventive measures to reduce aggression in any case (see other side), but especially if extreme aggression occurs. Monitor the occurrences of extreme cases to assess the impact of management changes. Note down pigs with extreme numbers of lesions and monitor them as they have a higher risk of reduced immunity.

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This flyer is produced from multiple research projects on pig aggression, led by SRUC Researchers.  
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# Pig Aggression - 7 Tips

## Optimize regrouping

Mixing pigs helps to optimize group formation and allows precision feeding. Disadvantages such as stress, aggression and disease spread can level out the benefits.

**Tip 1** Avoid regrouping when possible. If needed, than regroup pigs as young as possible. The older and heavier pigs are, the more likely that growth will be reduced and injuries occur.



**Tip 2** Try to keep the number of unfamiliar pigs per pen as low as possible. The higher the familiarity, the fewer the fights. Caution: Do not put one or two unfamiliar pigs in an established group.

## Careful selection of sows

Aggressiveness is heritable. Careful selection of the sows can thus reduce aggression in the population.

**Tip 3** Score gilts on aggressiveness (e.g. 0 not aggressive – 5 aggressive) and take this score into consideration when selecting replacements.

## Co-mingling litters pre-weaning

Co-mingling, or socialization, involves putting two or more litters together before weaning. This increases pigs' abilities to resolve dominance relationships quickly with limited long-term aggression.

**Tip 4** Let litters co-mingle a few days before weaning (by removing barriers between crates) to reduce stress at weaning.



## Pen conditions

When space is limited, pigs cannot properly retreat.

**Tip 5** Providing plenty of space at mixing allows pigs to establish their hierarchy quickly.

**Tip 6** Provide an obstacle behind which a pig can hide its head (e.g. straw bale) as this can substantially reduce injuries.



**Tip 7** Enrichment material occupies pigs and keeps them from continued fighting. Caution: items can also be a resource to fight over, increasing aggression. Only provide an item if one pig can't control it (e.g. straw).