

Research program IZS VE 10/13

Effect of using immunisation against Gonadotropin-releasing hormone on the behaviour and welfare of fattening gilts

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During oestrus pigs are more prone to lameness, fractures, wounds, and biting, due to mounting and agonistic behaviour. Although recent studies highlighted this welfare issue in “light weight” pigs (116 kg), only unofficial reports of veterinarians and farmers have pointed it out in pigs slaughtered over 160 kg and a few months after reaching the sexual maturity. Hence, the first phase of this project is an epidemiological survey on farm and at slaughter about the impact of sexual behaviour on heavy pigs.

The immunization against Gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) was found to be effective in reducing aggressiveness and skin lesions in males. On the contrary, there is a lack of data about the possible use of immunocastration to extinguish sexual behaviour in entire females (gilts). Therefore, in the second phase, we will evaluate the efficacy of immunocastration to improve the welfare of gilts in intensive conditions, highly stressful for the animals, even if in compliance with EU legislation (e.g. enrichments, space allowance). Our results will be suitable for the outdoor/extensive systems as well, to prevent the attraction of wild boars (risk for spread of diseases, damages).