



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Department of Applied Animal Science and Welfare

Student project opportunity:

Freedom of choice: using natural foraging behaviour to promote health and welfare in commercial pig production

“When a piglet cannot choose, she ceases to be a piglet.”

— adapted for piglets from the original by Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

Pigs forage to meet their nutrient requirements but also because exploring and searching for food is rewarding in itself. However, intensively farmed pigs have little opportunity to engage in natural foraging behaviours. If pigs’ behavioural needs are not met from early life onwards, resilience (the ability to cope with and recover from challenges) is reduced, while disease susceptibility and anxiety are increased, leading to poor welfare. In this project, we aim to give piglets the freedom of choosing different foraging activities (i.e., different food types and ways to forage) in order to simulate some of the experiences that they would get in nature.

We will investigate the importance and effects of choice by measuring piglets’ willingness to work for choice and by assessing whether they prefer the freedom to choose different foraging activities vs no choice. In addition, we will test if providing piglets with freedom to choose different foraging activities early in life will increase early-feed intake and indicators of positive welfare, and reduce post-weaning diarrhoea and tail biting.

We are now looking for students to join our team and make a difference for pig welfare!

Your tasks:

- Applying the behavioural demand methodology to assess the importance of free choice
- Behavioural observations in the home pens (play behaviour and aggressive behaviours)
- Collect health and performance data of sows and piglets
- Video analysis (food intake and food preferences)
- Data analysis

Requirements:

- Ability to work independently and within a team

- Willingness to work hands-on with the animals as well as data and video analysis in the office
- Motivated to learn about animal behaviour and welfare
- Good written and spoken English skills

Our offer to you:

- Mentorship, guidance and support with data collection and statistical analysis
- Being part of an excellent and friendly research team
- A friendly and supportive working environment

Duration of Internship: anytime between October 2024 and July 2025 (flexible start and end times)

Working hours: Monday to Friday from 08:00 am to 05:00 pm (flexible)

Compensation: Unfortunately, we can't offer any financial compensation

This internship/project will help you to develop your career within the field of animal welfare research. You will have the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge as well as practical experiences.

If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to your positive response and to welcoming you to our team.

For more information contact:

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