The status of sow welfare in selected districts of Uganda

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Introduction

- Pig production has dramatically increased over the last three decades in Uganda, owing to the growing demand for pork.
- Large informal sector characterized by mainly backyard systems with small stock of animals that are kept free-roaming or tethered.
- Low productivity from limited resources and veterinary support.
- Compromised animal welfare leads to reduced productivity.

Methods

- Cross-sectional survey in Masaka, Mukono, Mpigi and Wakiso districts
- 270 pig farms: 3,561 pigs
- Welfare indicators: resource-based (housing and water supply), animal-based (pig body condition and physical injuries), and management-based (records of morbidity and mortality)

Findings

- Across all farms, sow mortality in the last 12 months was reported to be 2.5% (95% CI: 1.7, 4.8%).
- Animal-based indicators identified 9% (CI: 6.1, 13.7%) of sows with scouring/diarrhea, 7.6% (4.7, 11.5%) with lameness and 92% (CI: 85.1, 96.7%) of dry or lactating sows were found to be ‘skinny’ with a body condition score of 1 or 2.
- In addition, piglet mortality was as high as 10.2% (CI: 8.5, 12.9%).
- A total of 19% of sows were partially or completely restricted from free movement inside pens.
- 93% of sows had continuous access to water, but only 48.8% of the water supplies were clean.

Findings

- Twenty per cent of farms reported sows experiencing stillbirths, 15% reported ill thrift, 12.5% reported respiratory disease and 10.8% reported gastrointestinal disease.
- Wakiso District registered the lowest pig mortality which was significantly lower compared to the other three districts.

Conclusion

- Ugandan pigs are exposed to severe undernutrition, dirty water, high mortality, physical injuries, poor housing, and health challenges (stillbirth, ill thrift and gastrointestinal disorders).
- Meaningful change to farmer livelihoods and pig welfare can be made by designing simple interventions that target improve housing structures, provision of cooling facilities especially during hot periods (heat stress) and bedding materials.
- The findings represent a benchmark for the assessment of the effect of such interventions designed to improve farm health and productivity.