

Behavior of finisher pigs housed in hoop and conventional buildings: How does this affect pork quality and eating experience?

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The US pork industry is diverse in regards to marketing schemes and housing systems. Some consumers have requested that pigs be raised on bedding, with natural ventilation and an increased space allowance. A percentage of pork producers have responded to these requests by raising their finisher pigs in hoop buildings and selling the final product through niche markets. Such markets in the U.S. include Niman and Certified Humane Pork. Finisher pigs housed in hoop buildings engage in a rich behavioral repertoire, which includes complex social interactions, maintenance (different feeding patterns in regards to the number of bouts and substrate ingestion) and increased locomotory activities (increased walking) compared to their conventional counterparts. Although detrimental behaviors can be reduced / avoided through increased space allowance, tail biting and aggressive interactions during mixing can occur in both systems. With these behavioral differences, questions on the final meat quality and overall eating experience have been investigated. Research comparing performance measures and meat quality of pigs finished in alternative versus conventional systems suggest that pigs finished in the alternative systems have similar performance measures and pork quality. If consumers continue to demand product from pigs raised in alternative systems, perhaps market premiums will be enhanced.