

Assessing Animal Welfare within Estonian Swine Farms



Alo Tänavots^{1,2}

¹ Chair of Animal Breeding and Biotechnology, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Tartu, Estonia.

² Chair of Food Science and Technology, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Tartu, Estonia.

*alo.tanavots@emu.ee

Keywords: welfare, health, pig, farrow-to-finish

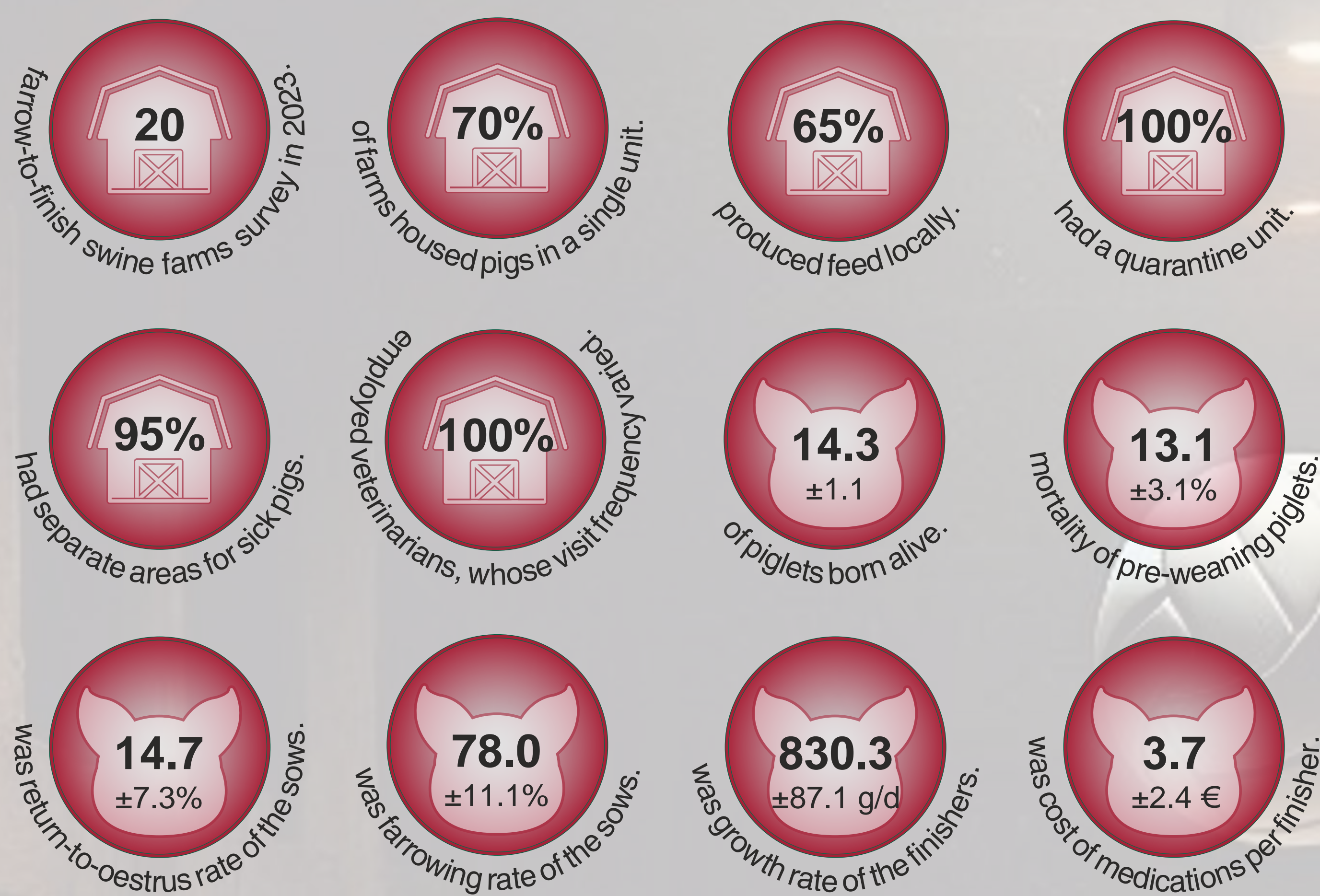


THE AIM

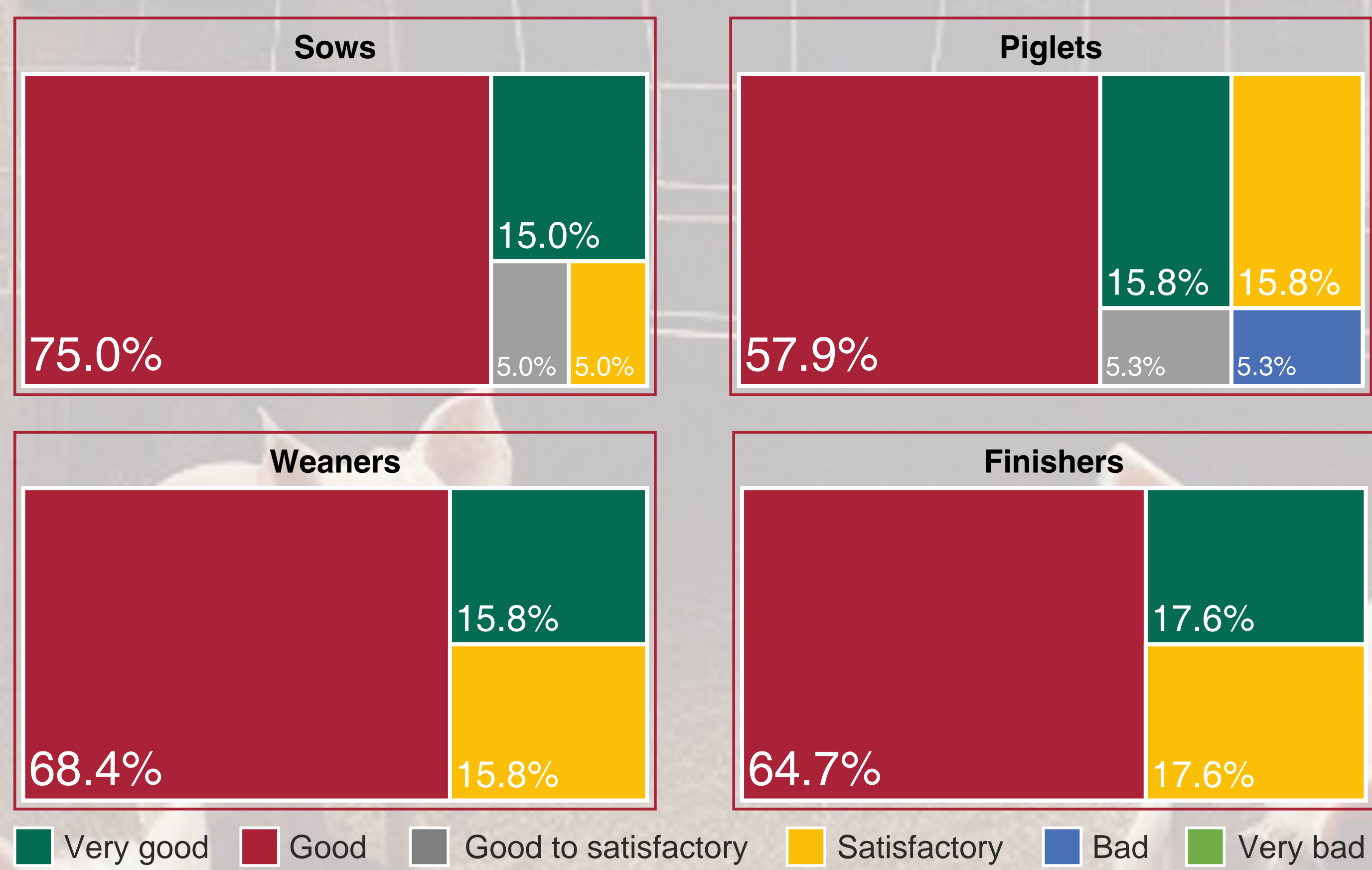
A pilot study was conducted to assess the animal welfare conditions in Estonian pig farms.

KEY FIGURES

Results are presented as average \pm standard deviation.



HEALTH STATUS OF THE HERD



Figures 1–4. Farmers' assessment of their herd's welfare across different physiological and age groups.

WELFARE STATUS OF THE ANIMALS

Additional remarks from farmers:

- » Ventilation and heating could be better.
- » The health of the piglets could be better.
- » Overall, things are improving. The animals have enough space and sufficient enrichment materials. We care for our animals and take care of them daily.
- » We strive to create as diverse an environment as possible for the animals by bringing enrichment materials into the pens (such as canisters and chains). Additionally, we ensure that the animals in the pens are evenly matched (by weight), and we respond quickly if an animal become stunted in growth. There is also the option to move sicker or weaker individuals to separate enclosures.

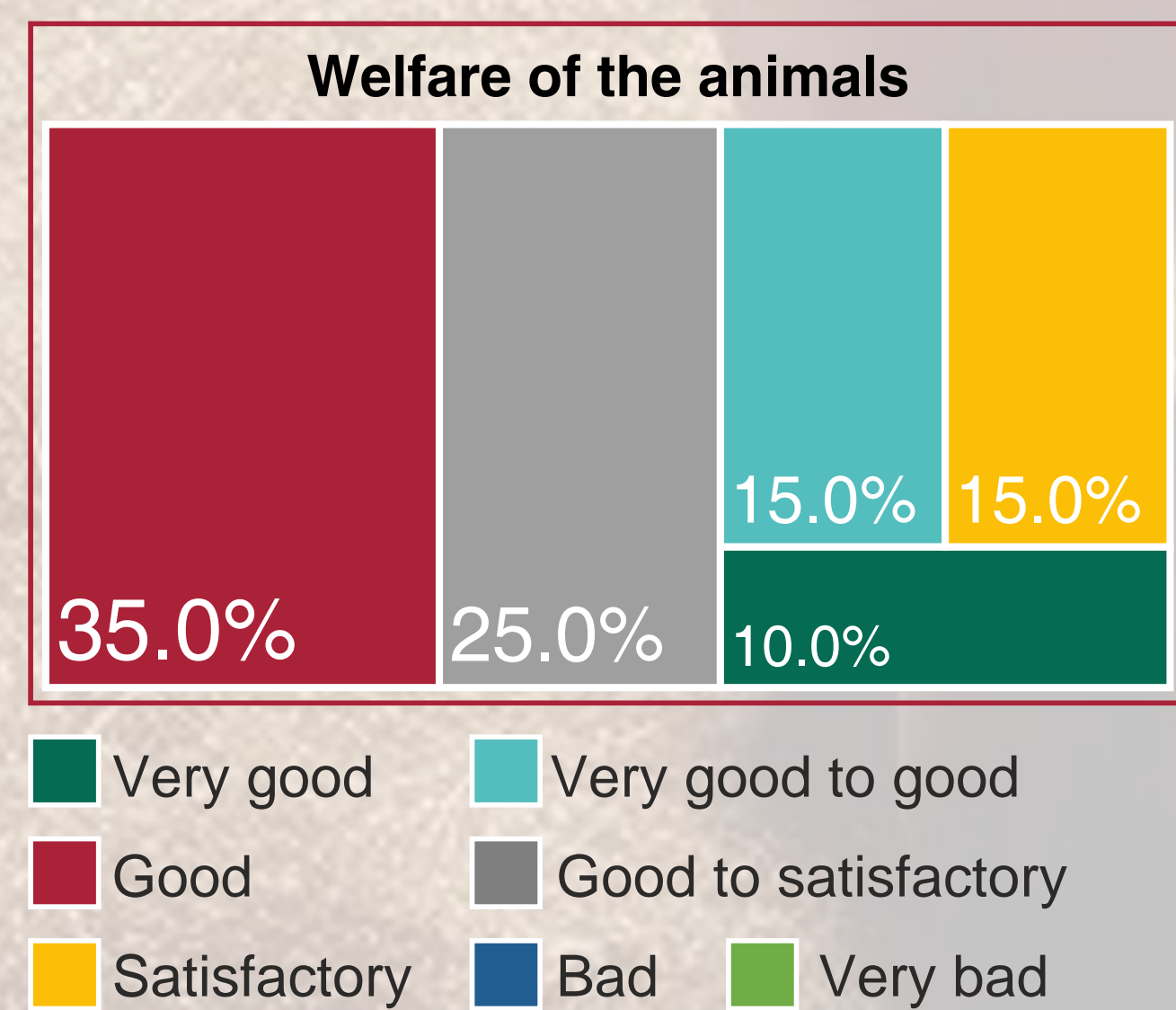


Figure 5. Farmers' assessment of their animals' welfare based on the Five Freedoms criteria.

VETERINARY TREATMENT NEEDS BY HEALTH PROBLEMS



Figures 6–9. Farmers' assessment of the treatment needs for selected health problems across different physiological and age groups of pigs.

TAIL BITING

Tail docking was practiced in 70.0% of farms, while all implemented pre-trial strategies for tail biting detection.

The most frequently cited triggers for tail biting were changes in **temperature** (29.5%), **ventilation** (20.5%), and **diet** (20.5%).

A wide variety of materials were used for pig manipulation activities, including **chains** (20.6%), **balls** (14.7%), and **wooden materials** (10.3%).

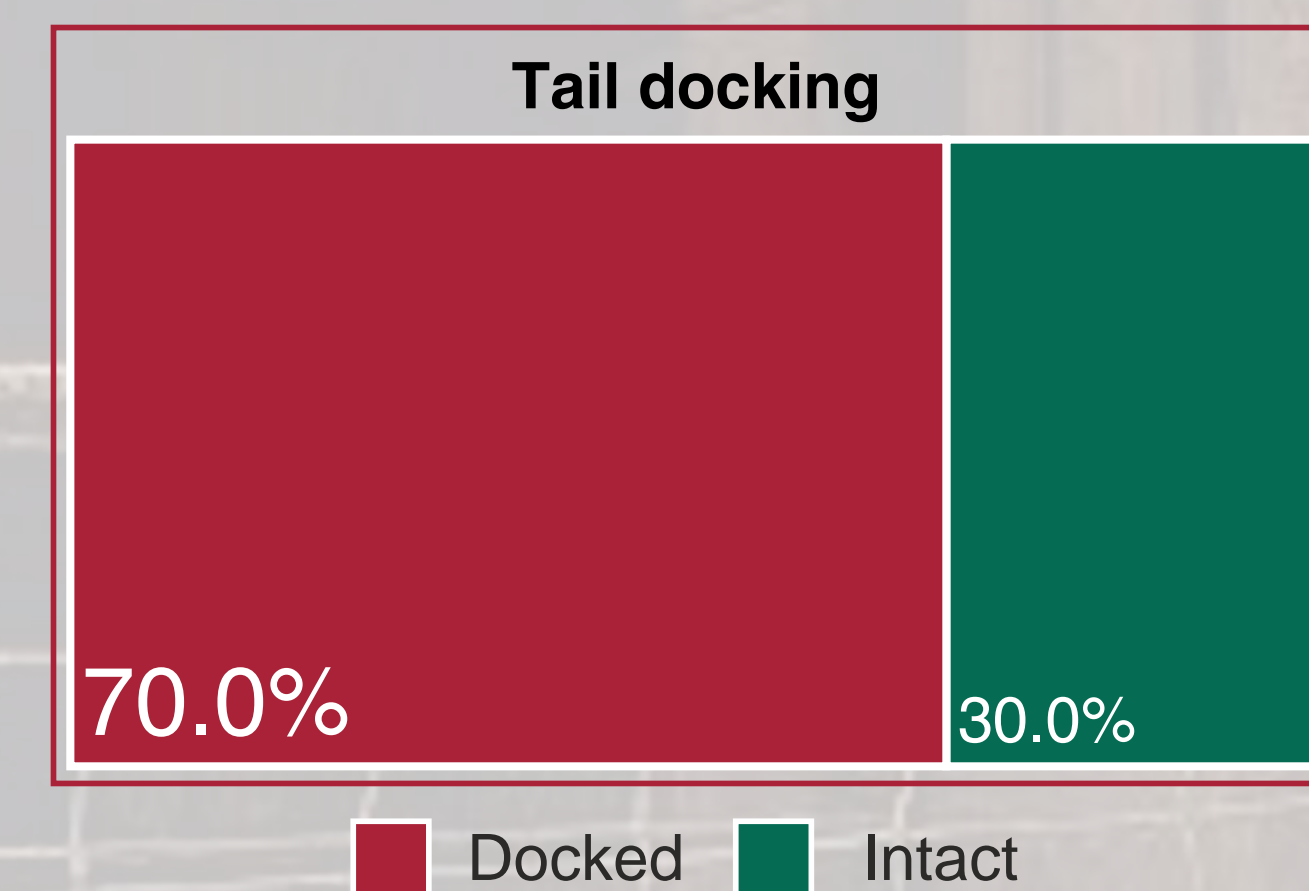
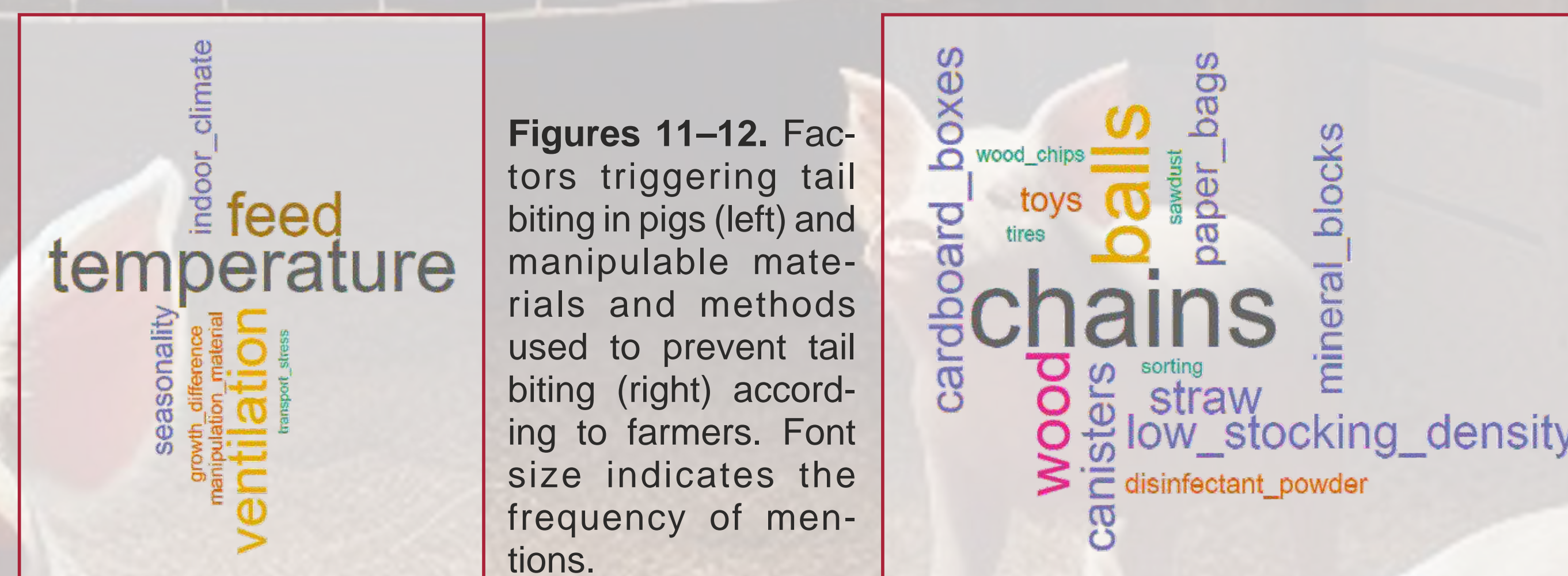


Figure 10. Tail docking of piglets on farms.



Figures 11–12. Factors triggering tail biting in pigs (left) and manipulable materials and methods used to prevent tail biting (right) according to farmers. Font size indicates the frequency of mentions.

CONCLUSIONS

The welfare and health of pigs are essential for both ethical and economic reasons. Healthy, well-cared-for pigs grow faster, convert feed more efficiently, and have lower mortality rates, directly boosting farm productivity. Improved welfare reduces stress, leading to better reproductive performance and higher-quality meat, which enhances profitability. Conversely, poor welfare increases veterinary costs and lowers overall farm performance. Investing in pig welfare is thus a key strategy for sustainable and profitable production.

In summary, investing in the welfare and health of pigs is not only a moral obligation but also a sound economic strategy that enhances overall farm performance, leading to sustainable and profitable swine production.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank all pig farmers and advisors involved in the study.



Eesti Maaülikool
Estonian University of Life Sciences

www.emu.ee

