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Effects of different enrichment devices on some welfare indicators of post-weaned undocked piglets

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1 **Effects of different enrichment devices on some welfare indicators of post-weaned undocked piglets**

2 **Running title: Enrichment devices for weaned piglets**

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16

17 **Abstract**

18 Two experimental trials were carried out in order to test the effectiveness of different environmental  
19 enrichments in improving the welfare of weaned pigs. A total of 120 undocked piglets was used. In trial one,  
20 group C1 received a metal chain and group WL a wooden log mounted on a frame. In trial two, the  
21 enrichments proposed were a hanging chain (group C2), an edible block (group ED) and a wooden briquette  
22 (group WB) mounted on a frame. The effectiveness of the enrichments was assessed in terms of animal  
23 behaviour, cortisol from bristles, hematologic and hematic profiles, cutaneous (skin and tail) lesions. Growth  
24 parameters were also recorded. Although some differences were detected in growth parameters in trial 1  
25 (with C1 group having better productive outcomes than WL group) and some minor differences were  
26 observed in animal behaviour in both trials, the overall welfare status did not differ among the experimental  
27 groups. On the other hand, no welfare issues emerged in groups C1 and C2, receiving the enrichment device  
28 which is generally believed to be scarcely attractive, i.e. the hanging chain. We can therefore conclude that,

29 if no managerial errors are made (floor space availability, feed inadequacy, group stability, microclimate,  
30 illumination), under the tested experimental conditions, hanging chains can provide a sufficient  
31 environmental enrichment for undocked piglets, even when compared to more attractive enrichments (*e.g.* an  
32 edible block).

33

34 **Keywords** animal welfare, blood parameters, environmental enrichment, intensive husbandry, pig, weaners

35

### 36 ***1. Introduction***

37 The term “environmental enrichment” is used widely in the literature to indicate improvements to captive  
38 animal environment. However, from a scientific point of view, it should only be applied to modifications  
39 capable of improving the biological functioning of captive animals (Newberry 1995). In the case of pigs, a  
40 successful enrichment should decrease the incidence of abnormal patterns of behaviour (stereotypies, belly  
41 nosing, ear and tail biting) and increase the frequency of species-specific behaviours such as social  
42 interactions, foraging and exploration (Petersen *et al* 1995; van de Weerd & Day 2009; Telkänranta, *et al*  
43 2014a).

44 The provision of manipulable materials to pigs of all ages is mandatory in the European Union since January  
45 2013 (Directive 2008/120/EC). However, the use of substrates listed in the directive (straw, hay, wood,  
46 sawdust, mushroom compost, peat) is not always feasible for farmers. Although straw indeed has the highest  
47 potential to be the “gold standard” enrichment material (Bracke *et al.*, 2006), its use, especially in slatted  
48 systems, can cause difficulties for slurry management (Scott *et al* 2007; EFSA 2007). On the other hand,  
49 indestructible objects such as metal chains or tyres are considered not sufficient to provide for the  
50 exploratory needs of pigs and, according to EFSA (2007) recommendations, they may be used as a  
51 supplement to destructible and rooting materials but not as a substitute for them. The main reason for such a  
52 provision is that such enrichments, according to the literature, can apparently provide only marginal welfare  
53 benefits in terms on animal welfare, since they allow pigs to perform manipulatory behaviours, but not actual  
54 rooting behaviours (*i.e.*, “to turn up by digging with the snout or nose” - American Heritage® Dictionary of  
55 the English Language, 2011), therefore the need for exploration may not be met by indestructible objects  
56 (EFSA, 2007). However, there is some evidence that it could be possible to design successful point-source

57 enrichment-objects, provided that they are able to sustain interest for a protracted period of time (van de  
58 Weerd & Day 2009) and that no competition for access to the enrichment occurs (Jensen *et al* 2010).  
59 According to Bulens *et al.* (2016), the provision of straw blocks reduced pen mates manipulation (e.g., tail  
60 and ear biting, belly-nosing) in finishing pigs. As it has been extensively reviewed by Bracke *et al.* (2006),  
61 various enrichment tools and materials have been proposed for piglets, including: cloth strips, rubber hoses,  
62 different amounts of straw, ropes, wood blocks, wood beams, straw racks, dog toys, mineral blocks,  
63 roughage and substrates (compost, earth, sawdust, peat). Their main conclusions were that metal objects  
64 show very few significant welfare benefits; and that rubber, rope, wood, roughage and substrates have more  
65 benefits than metal objects, but less than straw and compound objects. However, the review highlights how  
66 relatively little has been reported about mineral blocks and wood used as environmental enrichments for  
67 piglets. Trickett *et al.* (2009) compared the use of rope and wood as enrichments for weaned piglets and  
68 found that rope had a good attractiveness but, despite object alternation, habituation still occurred reducing  
69 the long-term attractiveness of the enrichments. Similar results were found in weaners by Blacksaw *et al*  
70 (1997), who observed a progressive decrease over time in interactions with the toy. However, both studies  
71 agreed that suspended or fixed objects are the most hygienic and attractive way to effect enrichment.  
72 The aim of the present work is to gain new insights on the effectiveness in improving the welfare level of  
73 post-weaned piglets, assessed through behaviour, health, physiology, and performance traits. The  
74 investigated enrichment-objects were made with poorly investigated materials (poplar wood, sawdust  
75 briquette and edible block), and compared to metal chains which are widely used when animals are raised on  
76 slatted floors. To this aim, a wide array of haematological, biochemical and behavioural parameters was  
77 measured to assess possible differences depending on the enrichment material used. If effective (*i.e.*, able to  
78 reduce stress indicators), the proposed enrichment tool might represent a viable alternative to straw  
79 especially on slatted floors, where the use of rootable substrates is ruled out by the constraints of manure  
80 collection and handling systems (Westin *et al.*, 2013).

81

## 82 **2. Materials and Methods**

83 The trials were carried out in the facilities of the Department of Veterinary Medical Sciences (DIMEVET) of  
84 the University of Bologna, Italy, in accordance with current Italian legislation implementing European

85 Council Directive 2008/120 on swine protection. The institutional Ethics Committee of the University of  
86 Bologna approved the experimental protocol (Authorization Prot. n. 2-IX/9 – 27.02.2012). In order to mimic  
87 farm conditions (*i.e.*, to provide environmental enrichment materials to all categories of pigs, according to  
88 the provisions set by the mentioned Directive), the experimental protocol did not include a negative control  
89 (*i.e.*, without enrichment) group.

90

### 91 2.1 Animals, housing and feeding

92 A total of 120 crossbred (Landrace × Large White) castrated male weaners were used in two separate and  
93 independent trials (n=60 per trial). Their tails were left undocked. Animals were weaned at 25 days of age  
94 and allowed to adapt to the new environmental conditions for three days. Animals' health status was  
95 monitored in order to identify possible health problems. At 28 days of age, the experimental groups were  
96 formed on the basis of their litter and body weight (BW) and the environmental enrichments were provided.  
97 Piglets were kept in collective flat-deck cages on a slatted metal floor, with a floor space of 2 m<sup>2</sup> per cage.  
98 Each cage was equipped with a nipple drinker (water was available *ad libitum*) and a collective stainless steel  
99 feeder (0.2 m wide x 1 m long). Piglets were located in temperature- and humidity-controlled rooms  
100 equipped with a forced-air ventilation system (RH was kept at 65% during the whole trial; T was kept at 28°  
101 at the beginning of the trial and gradually reduced of approximately 0.5°C per week, until the temperature of  
102 24°C was reached at the end of the trial).

103 Feed was provided *ad libitum*, in a pelleted form (3887 kcal DE/kg DM, CP 20.4% DM). Lighting was  
104 entirely artificial and was supplied by neon tubes (12 hours of light per day, from 7:00 to 19:00). In both  
105 trials, each replicate experienced one enrichment device for all the duration of the trial. Pictures of the  
106 enrichment devices are given in the Supplementary material (Figure S1).

#### 107 **TRIAL 1:**

108 Sixty animals were allotted to 2 experimental groups, each comprising 6 replications (*i.e.*, cages) of 5 piglets,  
109 which were subjected to the following experimental treatments

- 110 • Chain (C1) group: the environment was enriched by providing a steel chain hanging in the middle on  
111 each cage;

112 • Wood Log (WL) group: the environment was enriched by providing a metal frame holding in  
113 horizontal position a poplar log (10 cm in diameter, 25 cm long). The frame was attached to the cage  
114 structure approximately 10 cm above the piglets' withers, in such a way that piglets could easily  
115 access them with their snouts and rotate or bite the wood.

116 The average Body Weight (BW) at the beginning of the trial was  $6.76 \pm 0.77$  kg (average  $\pm$  SD).

117 Animals were kept under the experimental conditions for 48 days.

## 118 **TRIAL 2:**

119 Sixty animals were allotted to 3 experimental groups, each comprising 5 replications (*i.e.*, cages) of 4 piglets,  
120 which were subjected to the following experimental treatments

121 • Chain (C2) group: see trial 1

122 • Edible Block (ED) group: these cages were enriched by providing a metal frame (the same as in trial  
123 1, installed in the same position) holding in horizontal position a cylindrical edible block (10 cm in  
124 diameter, 25 cm long). The block was specifically formulated for the experimental trial and its main  
125 ingredients were feed, alfalfa meal, sugar beet molasses, and minerals. The frame was mounted in  
126 such a way that piglets could easily access them with their snouts and rotate or bite the block;

127 • Wood Briquette (WB) group: in these cages, a cylinder of compressed wood shavings was mounted  
128 on the same frames described before. The briquette had the same size as the edible block.

129 The average Body Weight (BW) at the beginning of the trial was  $6.35 \pm 0.58$  kg (average  $\pm$  SD).

130 Animals were kept under the experimental conditions for 43 days.

131

## 132 *2.2 Growth parameters*

133 All piglets were individually weighed at the beginning, in the middle (only in trial 1) and at the end of the  
134 trial, and average daily gain (ADG) was calculated for each period. Feed intake of each replication was  
135 recorded to calculate the feed conversion ratio (FCR) for each period. The cage (5 pigs in trial 1, 4 pigs in  
136 trial 2) was taken as the experimental unit for live weight, ADG, feed consumption, FCR.

137

## 138 *2.3 Tail and skin lesions*

139 In each of the trials, cutaneous and tail lesions were repeatedly evaluated on all piglets according to the  
140 Welfare Quality<sup>®</sup> (2009) assessment protocol. Since the protocol does not give specific indications for the  
141 postweaning phase, the method described for growing pigs was applied as suggested by the protocol itself,  
142 and only slight modifications were made (cutaneous lesions were counted on both sides of each piglet). In  
143 particular, tail lesions were visually evaluated by a trained observer and scored as 0 (intact tail, no evidence  
144 of tail biting); 1 (superficial biting, with no evidence of fresh blood or swelling) or 2 (fresh blood, evidence  
145 of swelling or infection; or tissue missing with formation of a crust). Skin lesions were evaluated on both the  
146 sides of the body and each body region (ears, front, middle, hindquarters and legs) was scored as “a” (up to 4  
147 lesions), “b” (5 to 10 lesions) or “c” (11 to 15 lesions). The individual piglet was then scored on a 0-to-2  
148 scale as described in the protocol, with 0 corresponding to piglets having all body regions classified as “a”  
149 and 2 to piglets having at least two body regions or more classified as “c”, or at least one body region with  
150 more than 15 lesions.

151

#### 152 *2.4 Behavioural traits*

153 The behaviour of 20 piglets for each experimental group (4 replications for in trial 1 and 5 replications in  
154 trial 2) was videotaped over the diurnal hours (7:00 to 19:00) by means of a digital closed circuit system  
155 (Mesa, Arezzo, Italy). Cameras were mounted on a rail attached to the ceiling above the cage (approximately  
156 3m above the ground). To allow for individual behavioural observations, 4 animal marking sticks of different  
157 colours were chosen (blue, green, red and purple – RAIDEX GmbH, Dettingenan der Erms, Germany) and  
158 assigned to 4 piglets. A spot of the corresponding colour was painted on the back of each piglet on the day  
159 before each videotaping session. The fifth piglet was left uncoloured. Piglets were videotaped over the 24  
160 hours once or twice a week, for a total of 6 videotaping sessions in trial 1, and 12 videotaping session in trial  
161 2. Videos were examined by a single trained observer and the behavioural patterns were assessed by scan  
162 sampling technique at 10-min intervals according to predetermined ethogram for heavy pigs (Martelli *et al.*  
163 2014) reporting the following behaviours: standing inactive, sitting inactive (dog-sitting), sternal  
164 recumbency, lateral recumbency, walking, eating, drinking, exploring the floor, social interactions. The  
165 ethogram was adapted to the specificities in piglets’ behaviour and to the trial by adding the following  
166 behaviours: tail biting, interaction with the environmental enrichment, interaction with other cage structures,

167 belly nosing. Results were expressed as proportion of time spent performing each behaviour. A detailed  
168 description of the behaviours observed in the ethogram is given in the Supplementary material (see Table  
169 S1). To get more insights on the use of the environmental enrichment, 3 days for each trial (one at the  
170 beginning, one in the middle and one at the end of the trial) were selected and videos for all the videotaped  
171 replicates were watched continuously (all-occurrences sampling), in order to record the number of  
172 occurrences and duration of each interaction with the environmental enrichment.

173

#### 174 *2.5 Blood and bristle sampling and analysis*

175 For each experimental group, a sub-sample of 15 piglets was randomly selected and blood samples were  
176 collected from each piglet in concurrence with the weightings. To this aim, piglets were manually restrained  
177 on their back and 15 ml of blood were drawn from the jugular vein and collected into 2 tubes, one containing  
178 lithium heparin and the other one containing EDTA. Blood was refrigerated immediately upon collection.  
179 Blood in K-EDTA was immediately sent to the DIMEVET laboratory, where the complete blood count  
180 (CBC) was performed using the haematology analyser ADVIA 2120 (Siemens Healthcare, Milan, Italy).  
181 Blood in Li-heparin was centrifuged at 3,500×g for 15 min at 4 °C to separate plasma. Plasma was frozen  
182 (−20 °C) until analysis of biochemical and metabolic profiles. The profiles included biomarkers able to  
183 assess:

- 184 (i) energy (glucose, fructosamine, total cholesterol, triglycerides) and protein (urea, creatinine)  
185 metabolism;
- 186 (ii) liver functionality (total bilirubin, aspartate aminotransferase= GOT,  $\gamma$ -glutamyltransferase = GGT);
- 187 (iii) oxidative stress (total reactive oxygen metabolites = ROM, Oxygen radical absorbance capacity =  
188 ORAC);
- 189 (iv) innate immune response evaluated by myeloperoxidase (index of neutrophil activity) and by indexes  
190 of acute phase response consequent to inflammatory events (positive acute-phase proteins: serum  
191 amyloid A, haptoglobin, ceruloplasmin; parameters linked to positive acute phase proteins: globulin,  
192 zinc; negative acute phase proteins: albumin, paraoxonase = PON).

193 Alterations of these biomarkers during the experiment was used to assess the welfare status. In particular, an  
194 increase of positive acute phase proteins and of ROM and a reduction in negative acute phase proteins and

195 ORAC can to detect the presence of subclinical conditions of disease (Petersen et al., 2004; Loor et al., 2013;  
196 Jacometo et al., 2016). Moreover, the concentration of fructosamine, which reflects the glycemia  
197 concentration of the last 1-3 weeks (Armbruster 1987), can be used as indicator of under nutrition (low  
198 values), disease status, distress (high values).

199 Glucose, total protein, albumin, total cholesterol, triglycerides, total bilirubin, creatinine, urea, GOT, GGT  
200 were detected at 37°C by a clinical auto-analyzer (ILAB 650, Instrumentation Laboratory, Werfen, Bedford,  
201 MA) using commercial kits purchased by Instrumentation Laboratory, Werfen (IL Test).

202 Ceruloplasmin, haptoglobin, PON, and MPO were determined with dedicated methods adapted to ILAB 650  
203 conditions. Ceruloplasmin was determined following minor modification of the method proposed by  
204 Sunderman & Nomoto (1970); haptoglobin (HP) was determined using the method proposed by Skinner et  
205 al. (1991); PON activity was assessed by adapting the method of Ferré et al. (2002), as previously described  
206 by Bionaz et al. (2007) and MPO activity was determined using the colorimetric method of Bradley et al.  
207 (1982), in which MPO reacts with hydrogenperoxide, producing H<sub>2</sub>O and O<sup>-</sup> and O<sup>-</sup> reacts with the O<sup>-</sup>  
208 dianisidinedihydrochloride, an electron donor, releasing H<sub>2</sub>O and a coloured compound.

209 Zn was determined by a commercial kit (Wako Chemicals GmbH, Neuss, Germany). ROM were measured  
210 using a method patented by Diacron International S.r.l. (Grosseto, Italy) and expressed as mg of hydrogen  
211 peroxide per 100 mL of plasma. Serum amyloid A (SAA) concentration was assessed with a commercial  
212 ELISA immunoassay kit (Tridelta Development Ltd., Manynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland). Total antioxidants  
213 were assessed through the oxygen radical absorbance capacity (ORAC) assay. This method measures a  
214 fluorescent signal from a probe (fluorescein) that decreases in the presence of radical damage (Cao & Prior,  
215 1999). The analysis of ORAC was performed with a multidetection microplate reader equipped with a dual  
216 reagent injector (BioTek Synergy2, Winooski, VT). Lastly, globulins were calculated as the difference  
217 between total protein and albumin.

218 Bristles were collected at the beginning and at the end of the trial by shaving the rump region of all piglets.  
219 Samples were handled and analysed as previously described by Bacci *et al.* (2014). In brief, bristles were  
220 washed with water and then twice with isopropanol in order to remove any organic residue from the surface.  
221 Once fully dried, samples were finely pulverized and incubated overnight with methanol for steroid

222 extraction. After centrifugation, methanol was collected and air-dried, and the dry extracts were analysed  
223 using a validated radioimmunoassay. Data were reported as pg of cortisol/ mg of bristle.

224 Since it has been possible to collect only a little amount of hair from each piglet, the analysis has been  
225 carried out on a pool of bristles for each cage (i.e., 6 pools per treatment in trial 1 and 5 pools per treatment  
226 in trial 2).

227

## 228 *2.6 Statistical analysis*

229 Data of each trial was separately analysed using the STATISTICA 10 package (StatSoft, 2011) or SAS Inst.  
230 Inc. (Cary, NC, USA; release 8.0, 2014).

231 For growth parameters, normality of data was assessed by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and the data  
232 obtained were submitted to analysis of variance using environmental enrichment as the main effect. The cage  
233 (5 pigs in trial 1, 4 pigs in trial 2) was taken as the experimental unit for live weight, ADG, feed  
234 consumption, FCR, behavioural observations and cortisol from bristles; individual data were taken to be the  
235 experimental unit for cutaneous and skin lesions and blood parameters.

236 For hematic parameters, the normal distribution was checked by using Proc UNIVARIATE (SAS Inst. Inc.,  
237 Cary, NC, USA; release 8.0) by NORMAL option. Parameters that were not normally distributed received a  
238 log transformation to satisfy normality and homogeneity of variance assumptions underlying linear models.

239 Through the text, the data are presented in the original scale (mean and s.e.m.). Transformed data were  
240 subjected to ANOVA using the MIXED procedure of SAS. The statistical model applied included the fixed  
241 effect of day from the introduction of the environmental enrichment, type of environmental enrichments and  
242 their interaction. The subject within the type of environmental enrichment was considered as a repeated  
243 measure. The pairwise comparison has been done using least significant difference (LSD) test.

244 For nonparametric data (behavioural traits, blood parameters, lesion and tail score), the Mann-Whitney test  
245 (trial A) or the Kruskal-Wallis test (trial B) were used. The chi-squared test was used to evaluate the  
246 distribution of skin and tail lesions in the severity classes. The significance level for all statistical tests was  
247 set at  $P < 0.05$ .

248

## 249 **3. Results**

250 Growth parameters of both the experimental trials are shown in table 1. In trial 2, no significant differences  
251 were observed between the experimental groups. Conversely, in trial 1 piglets of the C1 group showed  
252 significantly higher intermediate and final body weights ( $P = 0.01$ ) when compared to the WL group.  
253 Consequently, group C1 had a significantly higher ADG during the first period ( $P = 0.001$ ) and considering  
254 the whole trial ( $P = 0.01$ ). Feed consumption of WL piglets was significantly lower than in group C1 both  
255 during the second period and during the whole trial ( $P = 0.001$ ). Significant differences were also observed in  
256 FCR, with significantly lower FCR in C1 group during the first period and in WL group during the second  
257 period ( $P = 0.001$ ). Overall FCR tended to be lower in the WL group ( $P = 0.07$ ).

258 As concerns cutaneous lesions (skin and tail lesion scores, see Supplementary material, table S3), no  
259 significant differences were detected between the experimental groups during the trials. However, it should  
260 be highlighted that, in both trials, tail score distribution indicated a numerically lower degree of lesion  
261 severity in the “enriched” than in the control (i.e., “chain”) groups. In trial 2, tail score distribution showed  
262 tendentially ( $P < 0.1$ ) less severe tail wounds in ED when compared with C2 group.

263 Table 2 shows the behavioural patterns recorded during the two trials. Some statistical differences were  
264 detected between the ethograms of the experimental groups: in trial 1, piglets in the WL group spent more  
265 time standing inactive and rooting/exploring the floor, but less time manipulating cage components than  
266 piglets in the C1 group ( $P = 0.03$ ,  $P = 0.02$  and  $P = 0.001$ , respectively). Overall, the WL group showed a  
267 lower level of activity than the C1 group ( $P = 0.03$ ). In trial 2, the lowest level of activity was recorded in ED  
268 and the highest in WB group, with C2 being intermediate ( $P = 0.001$ ). As concerns the individual  
269 behaviours, WB piglets spent significantly more time eating ( $P = 0.001$ ) and tended to interact more with the  
270 environmental enrichment ( $P = 0.07$ ) than the other two experimental groups, whereas ED piglets spent more  
271 time resting in sternal recumbency ( $P = 0.03$ ) when compared to the other two experimental groups. Lastly,  
272 piglets in the C2 group spent more time drinking ( $P = 0.02$ ) and having positive social interactions ( $P =$   
273  $0.001$ ) than the other two experimental groups.

274 Figure S4 and S5 (given in the Supplementary material) show the number of occurrences and the duration of  
275 the interaction with the environmental enrichment material. In trial 1 (see figure S4), no statistically  
276 significant difference was found in the number or in the duration of the interactions. However, interactions  
277 lasted tendentially more ( $P < 0.1$ ) in WL than in C1 (on average 27.3 vs. 17.28 s). In trial 2, no significant

278 difference was observed in interaction number or duration, but the number of interactions tended to increase  
279 as time passed ( $P < 0.1$ , see figure S5). The increase in interaction duration is more evident for ED and WB  
280 groups and is due to the presence of some individuals that continued to be interested in the environmental  
281 enrichment during the entire trial, without showing any decreasing trend (data not shown).  
282 No significant differences were detected between the experimental groups in cortisol from bristles (table 3),  
283 in the complete blood cell count and in the neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio (N/L, see table 4).  
284 In the first trial, the presence of different environmental enrichments determined some differences in the  
285 metabolic profile (table 5). Twenty-one days after the introduction of WL, the concentration of glucose,  
286 albumin and PON in plasma were lower ( $P < 0.01$ ) in comparison with C1. These variations were transient  
287 and disappeared at third assessment. The concentrations of GOT and GGT increased during the experiment  
288 in both the environment enrichments, but the increase was smaller in WL in comparison with C1 group  
289 ( $P < 0.001$  and  $P < 0.001$  respectively), until the third assessment. Moreover, concentrations of triglycerides  
290 were higher ( $P < 0.01$ ) and concentrations of SAA tended to be lower ( $P < 0.10$ ) at the third assessment in WL  
291 in comparison with C1.  
292 In the second trial (table 6) the comparison among the environmental enrichments has been limited at two  
293 assessments, separated by 43 days. The differences in comparison to the control group (C2) at the end of the  
294 trial were smaller and limited to triglycerides lower in ED ( $P < 0.01$ ) and WB ( $P < 0.05$ ), and total protein  
295 higher in ED ( $P < 0.1$ ). At the beginning of the trial, glucose was higher in ED than in WB ( $P < 0.05$ ), total  
296 antioxidants (ORAC) were tendentially higher in ED than in C2 ( $P < 0.1$ ) and GGT was tendentially lower  
297 ( $P < 0.1$ ) in WB than in C2. Such small differences however disappeared at the second assessment.  
298 In both trials, the prevalence of piglets with positive acute phase protein (eg. SAA and HP) concentrations  
299 over the threshold of severe inflammations ( $> 0.1$  and  $> 1.5$  g/L for SAA and HP, respectively) was quite low:  
300 2.2% of piglets in trial 1 and about 13% of piglets in trial 2.

301

#### 302 **4. Discussion**

303 The aim of the present work was to study the consequences of the use of three point-source, destructible  
304 enrichment-objects, which might represent a viable enrichment on slatted floors, on post-weaned piglets'  
305 welfare. The point- source enrichment objects tested (poplar wood, sawdust briquette and edible block) were

306 compared to an indestructible object (*i.e.*, the widely used metal chain). Their effectiveness was assessed  
307 using a wide range of behavioural, health, physiology, and performance parameters.

308

### 309 Growth parameters

310 Overall, growth parameters recorded in the two trials were less favourable (similar or lower ADG, increased  
311 feed intake and FCR) than the data available in literature on piglets of similar age (*e.g.*, Trickett et al. 2009;  
312 Leliveld et al. 2013). This difference was expected and in agreement with the fact that these pigs are  
313 intended for the production of Parma Ham, an Italian PDO (protected designation of origin) dry-cured ham  
314 whose production rules require the use of raw tights from pigs of at least nine months of age and weighing  
315 on average 160kg at slaughter (Consortium for Parma Ham, 1992). Therefore, such production requires the  
316 use of genotypes that reach high BW in relatively longer times, *i.e.*, less efficient if compared with other  
317 meat types.

318 Growth parameters differed between the experimental groups in trial 1, but not in trial 2. Overall, in trial 1  
319 the WL group showed worse production parameters than the C1 group (lower body weight and ADG,  
320 reduced feed intake). FCR was higher in the first period, but lower in the second when compared to C1  
321 group. The improved feed conversion in WL group during the second period may indicate how, in spite of  
322 their relatively low daily gain and feed intake, these animals' body size has increased, resulting (because of  
323 the low feed consumption) in better FCR in comparison to C1 group. However, the worsening of productive  
324 parameters in WL group cannot be ascribed to wood chewing or ingestion, since the animals have barely  
325 notched it. It has been observed that pig-specific enrichment objects usually do not influence performance  
326 parameters negatively, and that negative effects are mainly found when the enrichment provided does not  
327 fulfil all the pigs' requirements (Van de Weerd et al. 2009). Within this context, it cannot be ruled out that  
328 WL may have represented a worse environmental enrichment than hanging chains, being less manipulable  
329 or, at least, less easily chewable and movable. In fact, in WL piglets some transient negative changes were  
330 observed at the blood profile. WL showed a marked reduction of albumin and PON at 2<sup>nd</sup> assessment in  
331 comparison to control, which suggests a slight reduction in liver functionality, likely as consequence of  
332 previous inflammatory events (Gruys et al., 1998; Bertoni and Trevisi, 2013). It should however be  
333 highlighted that no behavioural or physiological signs of impaired welfare have been detected in the WL

334 group at the end of the experimental period. For example, the plasma changes were transient and other  
335 plasma indices were more favourable in comparison to piglets of the control group (e.g. the lower  
336 concentrations of liver transaminase and the lower concentration of SAA at the third assessment). Thus, the  
337 overall metabolic and inflammatory conditions did not differ among groups tested in trial 1.

### 338 Skin and tail lesions

339 As concerns skin and tail lesions, the absence of differences in their level (*i.e.*, lesion score) and severity  
340 (*i.e.*, score distribution) indicates how the environmental enrichment materials proposed have determined no  
341 substantial modifications in animal aggressive behaviours. However, it should be highlighted that the level of  
342 skin and tail lesions recorded is very low in all the experimental groups if compared to the results obtained  
343 by Temple et al. (2011), who applied the Welfare Quality® protocol to intensively reared growing pigs. To  
344 our knowledge, no literature is available on the application of the Welfare Quality® skin and tail lesion score  
345 to post-weaned piglets. Tail lesion distribution across the severity classes was similar among the  
346 experimental groups, with the majority of piglets (especially in trial 2) having intact tails, and only a  
347 minority showing severe lesions. Such a distribution indicates a considerably lower level and severity of tail  
348 biting in all the experimental groups if compared to what has been observed in undocked weaners in other  
349 studies (Tellkantra et al. 2014b). Overall, the low number of lesions observed is of further interest if we  
350 consider that the post-weaning period is critical for the development of oral behaviour redirection  
351 (massaging, tail biting), especially when piglets are reared in barren environments (van de Weerd et al.,  
352 2005; Tellkantra et al. 2014b). Besides, in both trials lesion frequency and severity were reduced in the  
353 “enriched” groups. Therefore it cannot be ruled out that the alternative enrichment devices might have,  
354 although not significantly, reduced the piglets’ exploratory behaviour directed towards the tail of the pen-  
355 mates. The low number of piglets with severe lesions is also confirmed by the low frequency of piglets with  
356 severe inflammatory conditions, diagnosed in accordance with the low concentrations of positive acute phase  
357 proteins (e.g. SAA and HP). Despite the thresholds of these proteins which identify clinical cases are not  
358 well defined, their high concentrations represent a systemic response after a severe psychological stress,  
359 injuries or infections (Chen et al., 2003; Jacobson et al., 2004; Hansson et al., 2011; Pomorska-Mol et al.,  
360 2013). In the present experiment, the number of piglets with clear inflammation has been defined utilizing  
361 the threshold of 0.1 mg/L for SAA and 1.5 mg/L for HP. In trial 1 less than 3% of piglets showed severe

362 inflammations; in trial 2, the percentage increased to 13%. In both trials, the introduction of the  
363 environmental enrichments has not affected the frequency of the severe inflammation in the population,  
364 which seems largely dependent to other environmental factors, not easily detectable. Interestingly in the trial  
365 2, the WB showed better results of ED in term of inflammatory conditions. In fact, the higher concentration  
366 of Zinc (which is sequestered in the liver during inflammatory events - Bertoni and Trevisi, 2013-) and the  
367 lower concentration of SAA suggests a lower inflammatory events or a less severe inflammation in WB than  
368 in ED (Jacobson et al., 2004; Hansson et al., 2011).

### 369 Behavioural observations

370 The differences observed between the experimental groups in trial 1 were mainly due to an overall reduced  
371 activity (i.e., higher degree of calmness) of group WL (increase in the percentage of behaviours such as  
372 standing inactive and rooting/exploring the floor; decrease in cage components exploration). In trial 2, the  
373 higher degree of calmness was observed in ED group (increased sternal recumbency, reduction in positive  
374 social interactions) and the lowest in WB (reduced sternal recumbency, increase in time spent eating and  
375 interacting with the enrichment), with C2 group being intermediate. The time spent interacting with the  
376 environmental enrichment was similar between the experimental groups in trial 1, whereas in trial 2 the  
377 enrichment that tended to involve the piglets more was the WB. Overall, in the 2 trials the time spent  
378 manipulating the environmental enrichment by all experimental groups was higher if compared to the results  
379 described by Trickett et al (2009). Although such a percentage of time is very low if compared with the  
380 occupational level provided by straw (Kelly et al., 2000), it has been demonstrated that in rats the  
381 behavioural changes observed in the enriched environment were due to the presence of the enrichments  
382 themselves in the cages (indirect effects) and not due merely to rats interacting with the enrichment (Abou-  
383 Ismail et al., 2010). In the case of rats, environmental enrichment promoted longer bouts of sleep and  
384 diminished aggressive behaviour, improving welfare. Similarly, in pigs, it cannot be ruled out that the  
385 presence of enrichment could have improved welfare even when animals spent little time in direct contact  
386 with it, *i.e.*, that the frequency of object use alone may not be indicative of improved/impaired welfare  
387 (Tellkantra et al. 2014b). This observation would be in agreement with the higher calmness levels that were  
388 observed in groups WL (trial 1) and WB (trial 2). Unexpectedly, piglets did not show an increased interest  
389 towards the edible material when compared to the hanging chain. However, such a result can be at least

390 partially explained by the fact that animals were fed *ad libitum*. The greater use on the wooden briquette by  
391 piglets when compared to the edible block might be due to the fact that the wooden briquette was more  
392 friable (i.e., more destructible and manipulable) than the edible block (Studniz et al., 2007). No alterations  
393 were detected in the harmful social behaviours (aggressive interactions, tail biting, massaging).  
394 The observation of videos in continuous showed that in trial 1 piglets tended to carry out longer interactions  
395 with the wood log than with the chain, probably due to the fact that the wood log was more manipulable and  
396 smelling and might have captured the interest of piglets for longer times if compared with the metal chain. In  
397 trial 2, over time piglets tended to increase the amount of time they spent interacting with the enrichment (in  
398 particular with the wood briquette and the edible block). However, the increase was not homogeneously due  
399 to all piglets, but to the presence of some subjects, which continued to interact with the enrichments for the  
400 entire duration of the trial, without showing the decreasing trend that is typically observed when habituation  
401 occurs (Trickett et al., 2009). This finding shows that not all piglets find equally attractive the same  
402 enrichment, but also confirms that the proposed enrichments may be more capable of capturing the piglets'  
403 attention. However, it would be interesting to analyze if such an interest is maintained as the piglets grow up.

#### 404 Hair cortisol and haematologic parameters

405 As concerns hair cortisol levels, no significant differences were detected between the groups at the same  
406 sampling time. This shows that the materials used for environmental enrichment did not activate the  
407 hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical response in terms of chronic stress. When comparing cortisol values  
408 of the same group at the 2 different experimental times, it is noticeable that the first ones are slightly higher.  
409 This might be related to the last few days of intrauterine life and lactation since maternal cortisol blood  
410 concentration rises before and during delivery, and returns at normal values at weaning (Whitely *et al.* 1984).  
411 As concerns the haematological parameters, the absence of differences in CBC or in N/L ratio between the  
412 experimental groups indicates that none of the experimental groups was subjected to sub-chronic stressors. In  
413 fact, under environmental stressors the N/L ratio tends to increase in pigs (as extensively reviewed by Kick  
414 et al. 2011). Overall, parameters fell within the reference intervals for the swine specie (Thorn 2000). From  
415 the comparison between trial 1 and trial 2, discrepancies can be observed between the two trials in the  
416 differential leukocyte count. In trial 2, total leukocytes at the beginning of the trial were higher than in trial 1,  
417 and the difference is due to a higher number of neutrophils that considerably diminished in the second

418 assessment. Although we did not carry out any specific analysis, the presence of a subclinical viral infection  
419 (probably caused by PCV2 – Porcine Circovirus type 2) in these piglets cannot be ruled out. The presence of  
420 a circovirus infection could explain both the neutrophilia observed at the beginning of trial 2 and the reduced  
421 growth rate of these piglets if compared to the results obtained in trial 1, although no overt clinical signs  
422 were observed. Moreover, neutrophilia (together with lymphopenia) is commonly observed in PCV2  
423 infections (Gauger et al 2011).

424 The higher number of total leukocytes in the trial 2 in comparison with the trial 1, also agrees with the  
425 different inflammatory profile. In fact, in the trial 2 the incidence of piglets with positive acute phase protein  
426 (eg. SAA and HP) concentrations over the threshold of severe inflammations was higher in comparison with  
427 trial 1 (about 13% vs 2.2% of the piglets).

428

## 429 **5. Conclusion**

430 The results obtained from the present research trials did not allow to identify among the materials tested an  
431 environmental enrichment material being particularly effective in improving piglet welfare if compared with  
432 the metal chain. This observation can be drawn considering the fact that no peculiar difference has been  
433 detected in behavioural, physiological or growth parameters of piglets receiving the innovative  
434 environmental enrichment materials when compared to piglets receiving the traditionally used hanging  
435 chains. Unexpectedly, piglets did not show an increased interest even towards the edible material. Although  
436 our data refer to animals kept in small groups (4 or 5 piglets/cage), the overall results indicate that under our  
437 experimental conditions piglets receiving the metal chain attained a satisfactory welfare level. In fact, in spite  
438 of their theoretically low enrichment level and of the intact tails, no tail-biting outbreak occurred and no  
439 behavioural or biochemical alteration were observed. Therefore, without devaluing the importance of  
440 adequate enrichment tools, under practical farming conditions attention should be paid not to allow the use of  
441 enrichments as a mean to compensate for poor environmental conditions or to overlook underlying welfare  
442 issues.

443 Overall, the results of the present study highlight a basic issue related to the inner nature and meaning of  
444 environmental enrichment itself. The fact that several enrichment devices (differing in materials and/or  
445 design) had similar effects, urges a reflection on what is an effective enrichment tool, and what only attracts

446 stereotyped behaviours. Besides, there would be possibilities that enrichments considered similar by humans  
447 could have different effects on behavior and performance of animals. For these reasons, there is a clear need  
448 for further studies on what components of environmental enrichment do actually influence the animal as a  
449 whole (e.g., behaviour, physiology etc.) or only in part (lesions, etc.) and how it happens.

450

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455

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577 **Table 1:** Live weight and average daily gain (ADG) of piglets receiving different environmental enrichment  
 578 materials (C1 and C2 = hanging chains; WL = Wood Log; ED = Edible block; WB = Wood Briquette)

		<b>Trial 1</b>				
		<b>C1</b>	<b>WL</b>	<b>RMSE</b>	<b>p-value</b>	
<b>Replications (cage)</b>	n	6	6			
<b>Body Weight</b>						
Initial weight (0 d)	kg	6.77	6.74	0.79	0.95	
Weight at 21 d	kg	14.15	12.07	1.20	0.01	
Final weight (48 d)	kg	31.99	28.67	1.41	0.01	
<b>Average Daily Gain (ADG)</b>						
ADG 0-21 d	g/day	351	275	2.81	0.001	
ADG 21-48 d	g/day	660	624	3.63	0.12	
ADG 0-48 d	g/day	526	474	2.02	0.01	
<b>Feed Consumption</b>						
1-21 d	g/day	762	762	-	-	
22-48 d	g/day	1203	943	8.20	0.001	
1-48 d	g/day	1010	864	4.62	0.001	
<b>Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR)</b>						
FCR 1-21d		2.19	2.78	0.19	0.001	
FCR 22-48 d		1.83	1.51	0.11	0.001	
FCR 1-48 d		1.92	1.82	0.089	0.07	
		<b>Trial 2</b>				
		<b>C2</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>WB</b>	<b>RMSE</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>Replications (cage)</b>	n	5	5	5		
<b>Body Weight</b>						
Initial weight (0 d)	kg	6.44	6.46	6.36	0.48	0.94
Final weight (43 d)	kg	24.49	24.86	26.19	2.40	0.62
<b>ADG:</b>						
ADG 0-43 d	g/d	429	428	461	4.68	0.47
<b>Feed Consumption</b>						
0-43 d	g/d	837	837	941	4.06	0.37
<b>FCR</b>						
FCR 0-43 d		1.94	1.95	2.05	0.22	0.72

579

580

581 **Table 2:** Diurnal behaviour (7:00 to 19:00) of piglets receiving different environmental enrichments (data  
582 are expressed as a percentage of total observed behaviours). (C1 and C2 = hanging chains; WL = Wood Log;  
583 ED = Edible block; WB = Wood Briquette)

	Trial 1			Trial 2			
	C1	WL	P-value	C2	ED	WB	P-value
Standing inactive <sup>1</sup>	3.54	4.42	0.03	3.24	2.69	2.69	n.s.
Sitting inactive (dog sitting) <sup>1</sup>	1.22	1.31	n.s.	1.30	1.36	1.29	n.s.
Sternal recumbency <sup>1</sup>	28.50	27.01	n.s.	36.20	38.01	35.32	0.03
Lateral recumbency <sup>1</sup>	36.46	38.92	n.s.	38.04	37.84	38.37	n.s.
Eating <sup>2</sup>	14.11	13.93	n.s.	9.94	9.95	11.94	0.001
Drinking <sup>2</sup>	2.49	2.20	n.s.	1.99	1.40	1.47	0.02
Walking <sup>2</sup>	2.74	3.14	n.s.	1.95	1.54	1.61	n.s.
Rooting/Exploring the floor <sup>2</sup>	1.89	2.24	0.02	0.71	0.95	0.86	n.s.
Positive interaction <sup>2</sup>	3.65	3.33	n.s.	2.01	1.53	1.61	0.001
Aggressive Interaction <sup>2</sup>	1.77	1.45	n.s.	0.08	0.09	0.08	n.s.
Tail biting <sup>2</sup>	0.69	0.54	n.s.	0.05	0.05	0.05	n.s.
Massaging <sup>2</sup>	0.73	1.23	n.s.	2.66	2.61	2.47	n.s.
Interaction with the enrichment <sup>2</sup>	0.66	0.57	n.s.	0.54	0.50	0.79	n.s.
Manipulation of cage components <sup>2</sup>	1.64	0.74	0.001	0.49	0.62	0.56	n.s.
Total inactive <sup>1</sup>	69.63	71.66	0.03	78.78	79.85	77.66	0.001
Total active	30.37	28.34	0.03	21.22	20.15	22.34	0.001

584 <sup>1</sup> Inactive behaviours

585 <sup>2</sup> Active behaviours

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588 **Table 3:** Cortisol from bristles of piglets receiving different environmental enrichments (C1 and C2 =  
 589 hanging chains; WL = Wood Log; ED = Edible block; WB = Wood Briquette)

<b>Trial 1</b>					
	<b>C1</b>	<b>WL</b>		<b>RMSE</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Replication</b>	6	6			
<b>1st assessment</b>	8.39	9.72		1.72	0.52
<b>2nd assessment</b>	5.11	9.32		2.34	0.25
<b>Trial 2</b>					
	<b>C2</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>WB</b>	<b>RMSE</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Replication</b>	5	5	5		
<b>1st assessment</b>	7.81	7.27	7.52	1.62	0.89
<b>2nd assessment</b>	5.24	4.63	5.81	1.92	0.33

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592 **Table 4:** Complete blood count and N/L ratio of piglets receiving different environmental enrichments (C1  
 593 and C2 = hanging chains; WL = Wood Log; ED = Edible block; WB = Wood Briquette)

<b>Trial 1</b>							
	<b>1st assessment</b>		<b>2nd assessment</b>		<b>3rd assessment</b>		
	<b>C1</b>	<b>WL</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>WL</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>WL</b>	<b>SE</b>
<i>Haematocrit (%)</i>	41.1	39.2	35.8	33.5	39.4	39.8	0.45
<i>Haemoglobin (g/dL)</i>	12.6	12.0	10.5	9.8	11.6	11.5	0.14
<i>Erythrocytes (x10<sup>6</sup>/μL)</i>	7.196	6.956	6.642	6.354	7.264	7.305	0.07
<i>Leukocytes (/μL)</i>	10730	10668	17732	15901	16425	15327	554.24
<i>Neutrophil (/μL)</i>	3747	3645	5885	5544	5013	4965	261.72
<i>Lymphocyte(/μL)</i>	6209	5045	9931	8946	10149	9361	324.73
<i>N/L ratio</i>	0.60	0.66	0.61	0.64	0.53	0.51	0.03

<b>Trial 2</b>							
	<b>1st assessment</b>			<b>2nd assessment</b>			
	<b>C2</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>WB</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>WB</b>	<b>SE</b>
<i>Haematocrit (%)</i>	39.7	39.8	41.1	32.1	31.6	34.2	0.51
<i>Haemoglobin (g/dL)</i>	12.0	11.3	11.5	9.1	9.0	9.8	0.19
<i>Erythrocytes (x10<sup>6</sup>/μL)</i>	6.623	6.930	6.919	7.573	7.689	7.801	0.07
<i>Leukocytes (/μL)</i>	14371	13874	14671	15385	16652	17379	521.56
<i>Neutrophil (/μL)</i>	6275	6262	6192	3977	4424	4709	277.37
<i>Lymphocyte (/μL)</i>	6815	6635	7566	9767	10637	10495	336.57
<i>N/L ratio</i>	0.96	0.98	0.84	0.44	0.42	0.45	0.04

594 No significant difference was detected at the statistical analysis (P>0.05).

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**Table 5** –Plasma biomarkers of piglets (mean and Standard Error = SE) receiving different environmental enrichments (C1 = hanging chains; WL = Wood Log) during the trial 1.

Trial 1							
Time (days)	1st assessment (day 0)		2nd assessment (day 21)		3rd assessment (day 48)		SE
Group	C1	WL	C1	WL	C1	WL	
Glucose (mmol/l)	6.64	6.84	7.37	6.53**	6.10	6.28	0.212
Cholesterol (mmol/l)	2.24	2.33	2.29	2.56	2.15	2.27	0.127
Urea (mmol/l)	4.41	4.64	2.91	3.05	4.99	5.17	0.241
Zinc (µmol/l)	16.39	16.78	30.28	28.68	19.77	19.63	0.079
Ceruloplasmin (µmol/l)	13.45	12.21	11.55	11.57	13.26	12.26	0.697
Total Protein (g/l)	53.10	52.58	54.79	52.84 <sup>+</sup>	60.19	60.60	0.778
Albumins (g/l)	32.93	32.96	32.98	29.72**	38.27	38.15	0.773
Globulin (g/l)	20.16	19.63	21.81	23.12	21.92	22.45	0.032
AST/GOT (U/l)	52.44	54.31	92.70	63.04***	64.46	46.14**	0.079
GGT (U/l)	41.93	40.25	120.2	68.21**	121.3	70.96*	0.118
Total bilirubin (µmol/l)	1.60	1.62	1.23	1.79	0.80	0.68	0.132
Haptoglobin (g/l)	0.94	0.97	1.07	1.19	1.02	0.98	0.104
Paraoxonase (U/ml)	35.95	34.34	33.84	23.62**	45.42	48.71	2.21
Triglycerides (mmol/l)	0.389	0.414	0.666	0.700	0.363	0.487**	0.061
Creatinin (µmol/l)	99.2	102.4	69.0	67.4	82.8	86.1	2.16
ROMt (mg H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> / 100 ml)	33.26	28.72 <sup>+</sup>	22.26	19.12	26.05	22.08	0.056
Myeloperoxidase (U/l)	352	381	635	683	621	625	26.0
Fructosamine (µmol/l)	52.35	51.39	39.58	35.80	42.24	40.85	2.074
ORAC (µmol/l)	8201	8449	8634	9086	9631	9987	314.9
Serum amyloid A (µg/ml)	7.06	14.95	7.97	23.04	46.43	5.87 <sup>+</sup>	14.13

598 A significant statistical difference at the same assessment is shown by a superscript on the WL value (+  
599 P<0.10; \* P<0.05; \*\* P<0.01).

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602 **Table 6:** Plasma biomarkers of piglets (mean and Standard Error = SE) receiving different environmental  
 603 enrichments (C2 = hanging chains; ED = Edible block; WB = Wood Briquette) during the trial 2.

<b>Trial 2</b>							
<b>Time (days)</b>	<b>1st assessment (day 0)</b>			<b>2nd assessment (day 43)</b>			
<b>Group</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>WB</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>WB</b>	<b>SE</b>
<i>Glucose (mmol/l)</i>	6.82	7.38	6.59 <sup>(1)</sup>	5.68	5.54	5.38	0.37
<i>Cholesterol (mmol/l)</i>	2.03	2.00	2.04	2.71	2.55	2.55	0.17
<i>Urea (mmol/l)</i>	4.18	3.84	4.29	4.52	4.59	4.63	0.34
<i>Zinc (μmol/l)</i>	11.47	12.61	12.55	13.76	15.41	15.07	1.16
<i>Ceruloplasmin (μmol/l)</i>	19.28	19.50	18.89	16.17	14.78	16.57	1.75
<i>Total Protein (g/l)</i>	54.35	54.12	53.82	60.14	62.90 <sup>(2)</sup>	62.32	1.61
<i>Albumins (g/l)</i>	34.13	33.66	33.28	35.96	36.73	36.99	0.96
<i>Globulin (g/l)</i>	20.21	20.45	20.53	24.18	26.17	25.33	1.51
<i>AST/GOT (U/l)</i>	70.11	77.60	72.19	51.21	51.13	52.00	7.88
<i>GGT (U/l)</i>	96.32	83.57	58.01 <sup>(3)</sup>	48.77	43.61	45.60	0.21
<i>Total bilirubin (μmol/l)</i>	1.90	2.00	1.86	2.00	2.50	1.79	0.20
<i>Haptoglobin (g/l)</i>	0.93	1.05	1.12	1.22	1.21	1.32	0.17
<i>Paraoxonase (U/ml)</i>	33.95	34.63	33.29	30.54	29.97	33.56	3.35
<i>Triglycerides (mmol/l)</i>	0.509	0.473	0.413	0.612	0.474 **	0.488 *	0.06
<i>Creatinin (μmol/l)</i>	100.3	101.5	97.2	93.6	95.6	94.2	3.76
<i>ROMt (mg H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>/ 100 ml)</i>	30.22	31.83	31.11	28.84	26.89	27.89	1.70
<i>Myeloperoxidase (U/l)</i>	370	701	410	408	469	438	0.19
<i>Fructosamine (μmol/l)</i>	44.36	46.55	42.12	28.50	28.95	29.86	4.36
<i>ORAC (μmol/l)</i>	9105	10344 <sup>(2)</sup>	9923	11173	11198	10751	622.51
<i>Serum amyloid A (μg/ml)</i>	110.70	34.69	49.94	21.92	65.19	61.03	0.47

604 Significant statistical difference with C2 at the same time point is shown by a superscript on the ED and WB  
 605 values (\* P<0.05; \*\* P<0.01); (1) P<0.05 between ED and WB group; (2) P<0.1 between C2 and Ed group;  
 606 (3) P<0.1 between C2 and WB group.

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608 **Figure S1:** pictures of the environmental enrichment devices used during the experimental trials. C=metal  
609 chain; WL=Wood log; WB=Wood briquette; EB=Edible Block.



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613 **Table S2:** Description of the behaviours observed (Martelli *et al.* 2014, modified)

<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Description</b>
Standing inactive	Standing, neither moving forward or backward
Sitting inactive (dog-sitting)	Sitting on its tail with its foreleg stretched under the body
Sternal recumbency	Lying down on its belly
Lateral recumbency	Lying down on one side
Walking	Walking through the cage
Eating	Eating from the feeder or chewing food
Drinking	Mouth in contact with the drinker and water being ingested
Rooting/Exploring the floor	Aimless rooting, sniffing, touching the cage floor
Positive Interaction	Social, explorative, interactions performed by one pig and directed towards one or more pigs (e.g. nose-to-nose, nose-to-body)
Aggressive Interaction	Interactions (bites or head butts) ending with the victim piglet fleeing the performer
Interaction with the environmental enrichment	Any explorative interaction (sniffing, rooting, nosing or chewing) performed towards the enrichment.
Manipulation of cage components	Nosing, rooting, or chewing equipment (feeder or metal bars).
Tail biting	The performer holds the tail of the victim in its mouth
Massaging	Repetitive rooting movement with the snout on another piglet (belly-nosing or nosing any other body part).
Others	Other unlisted activities (e.g. running, playing)

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616 **Table S3:** Skin and tail lesions of piglets receiving different environmental enrichment materials. (C1 and  
 617 C2 = hanging chains; WL = Wood Log; ED = Edible block; WB = Wood Briquette)

		<b>Trial 1</b>		
		<b>C1</b>	<b>WL</b>	
<b>Animals</b>	n°	30	30	
<b>1st assessment (d 14)</b>				
<i>Skin lesions</i>	pt	0.27	0.23	
<i>Tail lesions</i>	pt	0.20	0.03	
<b>2nd assessment (d 36)</b>				
<i>Skin lesions</i>	pt	0.00	0.07	
<i>Tail lesions</i>	pt	0.48	0.67	
<b>3rd assessment (d 48)</b>				
<i>Skin lesions</i>	pt	0.38	0.43	
<i>Tail lesions</i>	pt	1.00	0.76	
<b>Overall skin score distribution</b>				
<i>Intact skin</i>	%	78,5	75.6	
<i>Moderate wounds</i>	%	21.5	24.4	
<i>Severe wounds</i>	%	0	0	
<b>Overall tail score distribution</b>				
<i>Intact tail</i>	%	56.6	68.9	
<i>Moderate tail lesion</i>	%	30.08	14.4	
<i>Severe tail damage</i>	%	12.6	16.7	
		<b>Trial 2</b>		
		<b>C2</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>WB</b>
<b>Animals</b>	n°	20	20	20
<b>1st assessment (d 15)</b>				
<i>Skin lesions</i>	pt	0.15	0.20	0.25
<i>Tail lesions</i>	pt	0.11	0.11	0
<b>2nd assessment (d 29)</b>				
<i>Skin lesions</i>	pt	0.50	0.40	0.53
<i>Tail lesions</i>	pt	0.45	0.25	0.26
<b>3rd Assessment (d 42)</b>				
<i>Skin lesions</i>	pt	0.65	0.32	0.43
<i>Tail lesions</i>	pt	0.32	0.05	0.26
<b>Overall skin score distribution</b>				
<i>Intact skin</i>	%	58.3	68.3	68.3
<i>Moderate wounds</i>	%	40.0	31.7	31.7
<i>Severe wounds</i>	%	1.7	0	0
<b>Overall tail score distribution</b>				
<i>Intact tail</i>	%	76.7	86.7	81.7
<i>Moderate tail lesion</i>	%	18.3	13.3	18.3
<i>Severe tail damage</i>	%	5.0	0	0

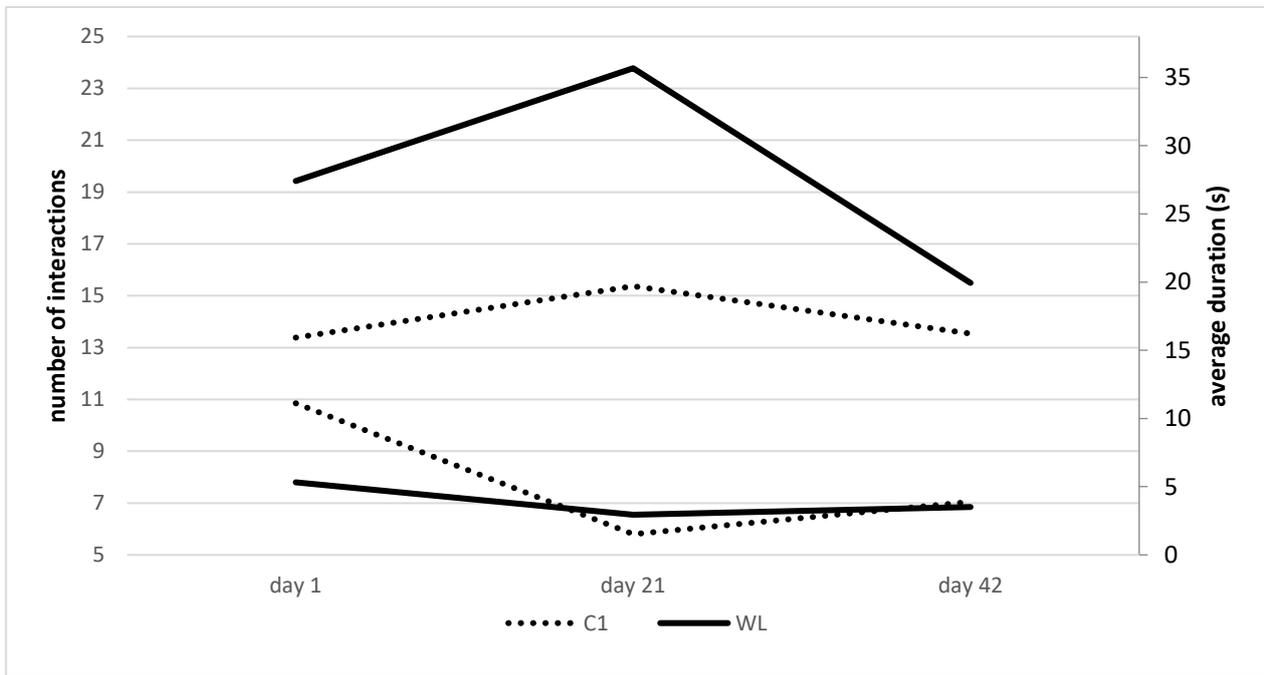
618 No significant difference was detected at the statistical analysis (P>0.05).

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621 **Figure S4** – Interactions with the environmental enrichments observed during trial 1: number of occurrences  
622 and average duration

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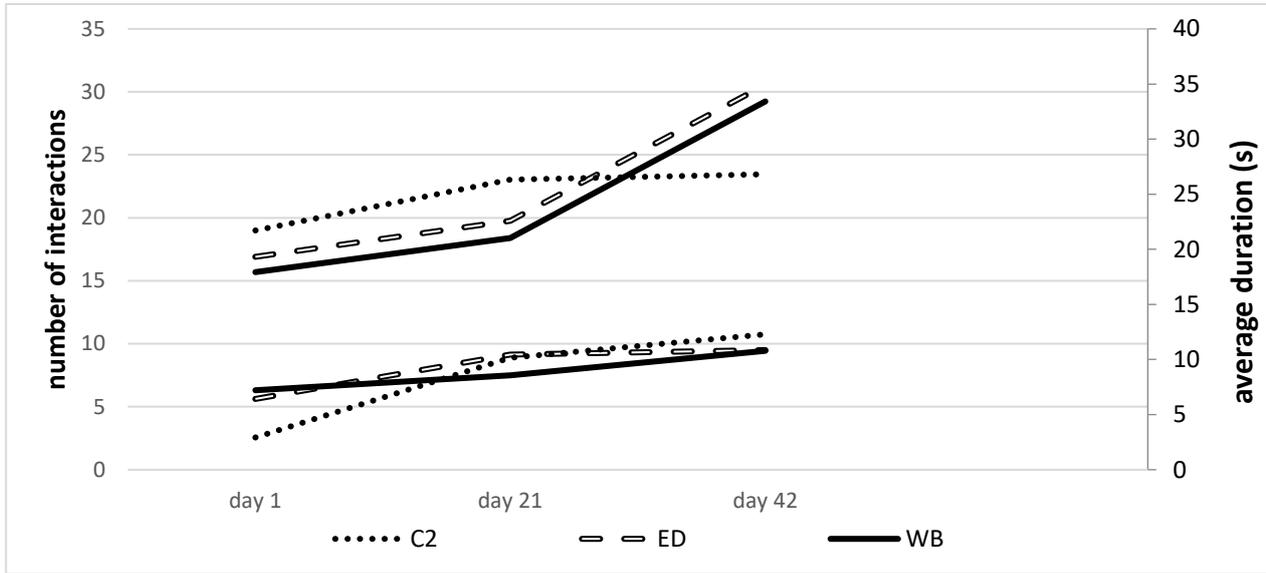
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628 **Figure S5** – Interactions with the environmental enrichments observed during trial 2: number of occurrences  
629 and average duration

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