

Refinement of Swine Enrichment via Customization of Foraging Balls Results in Increased Duration of Play

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Providing research animals with appropriate environmental enrichment helps to encourage species-specific behavior. In swine, this includes behaviors such as rooting and foraging. One of the ways to achieve this goal for swine in the research setting is to place food enrichment into a foraging ball—a hard, hollow, plastic toy which has pre-drilled holes in it to engage the swine in removing the food. Many of the commercially available foraging balls for swine have multiple small holes throughout the surface. This requires the use of small food items, which poses the problem of food falling through the grated, elevated flooring that swine are housed on in our facility. There are also commercially available foraging balls that have few extremely large holes in the surface; and in our experience, they do not present enough of a challenge for the swine. In an effort to provide the best possible enrichment for our swine, we created customized foraging balls from herding balls—a hard, hollow, plastic ball with no holes. The herding balls were customized by drilling varying size and numbers of holes. This allowed larger food enrichment choices which would not fall through the flooring, but still provided more of a challenge for the animals. The swine were observed playing and investigating the foraging balls for longer periods of time, approximately 30-45 minutes while there was food in the ball. These customized foraging balls create a more challenging experience for our swine, thus extending play time and providing a better enrichment experience in our facilities.

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The IACUC has approved the institution's enrichment program.

The preferred format is poster session.

Our category is husbandry/management.

This abstract is original and unfabricated.