

# Refinement – What do Minipigs want??

Animal welfare is an ongoing process. Rather than a destination, animal welfare at Ellegaard is considered a process where we continually adapt our actions to meet minipig needs in the best possible way.

**Read more about minipigs “on the run” in the corridors and cotton towels on the floor!**

In early 2013, we appointed a group made up of four animal technicians and the attending veterinarian to brainstorm about all the ideas and proposals we had regarding minipig enrichment.

(It is relevant to mention that in recent years, basic enrichment in the pens has consisted of straw on the floor, biting sticks, metal chains and, to some degree, plastic balls).

Every idea was written down on a “post-it” and put on the wall. The ideas were then discussed and categorised, and a pattern emerged: enrichment must be adapted to the age of the minipig. Toys can be entertaining for young minipigs whereas breeding sows couldn’t care less! Conversely, a good scratch on the back with a broom is appreciated by a sow, but not so much by young, lively minipigs.

Therefore we chose different actions in different sections. An example from the farrowing section is shown below.

Farrowing section	How	Time	Scheme no.
Sow and piglets in the corridor	3 groups/day	15 min./day	4
Scratching the sows’ back	Only if they like it!	10 min./day	5
Socialisation	Open the gate, squat and make the piglets come forward	10 min./day	6

We realise that this is not rocket science! The point is to systematise all the actions, write them down as Standard Operating Procedures and register them just like any other activity in the barriers. This way, we ensure that the efforts will not fizzle out.



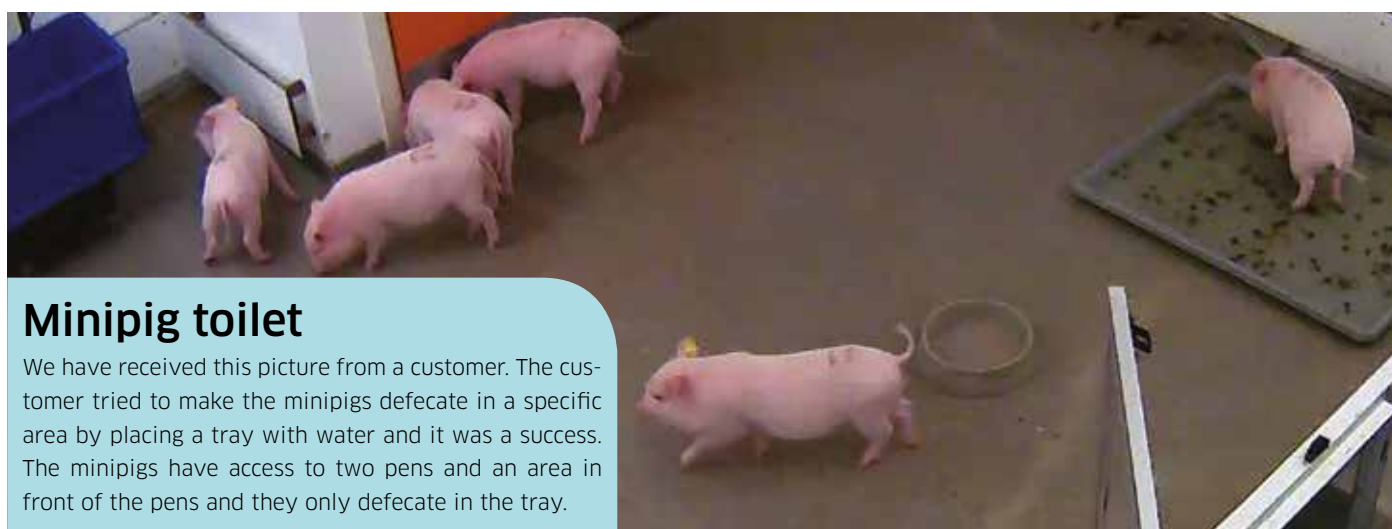
Even though different groups of minipigs like different types of enrichment, we found that they all had one thing in common: they love to go for a walk in the corridor! Therefore this activity has become routine in every barrier section.

Not only is it enriching for the minipigs on the run, but also for the other minipigs in the room. The time spent by the staff is limited – but admittedly it does require a little more floor cleaning!

Another thing which has become a daily routine is to put towels on the floor for weaned minipigs. They rub the towel actively with their snout; it is reasonable to imagine that they are mimicking the manipulation of the sow’s udder. Giving towels to old minipigs doesn’t really provide any activity.

We are continuously considering ways to enrich minipigs, keeping in mind that we can always do better. Remembering that time and resources are limited, we choose the activities with the most value for money. In this perspective a short walk in the corridor is the favourite – for animals and staff!

*Helle Lorentsen, DVM, Ellegaard Göttingen Minipigs*



## Minipig toilet

We have received this picture from a customer. The customer tried to make the minipigs defecate in a specific area by placing a tray with water and it was a success. The minipigs have access to two pens and an area in front of the pens and they only defecate in the tray.