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A METHOD OF MIXING GILTS AND SOWS WHICH REDUCES AGGRESSION EXPERIENCED BY GILTS

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In an experiment, the effects of pre-exposure of gilts to the group into which they were to be mixed on stress and aggression levels were studied. Three groups of five gilts were mixed into a group of c.23 multiparous sows after five days pre-exposure to these sows in a pen within the group house. This treatment was alternated with three control groups of five gilts mixed without pre-exposure. Over a period of two weeks after mixing, control gilts experienced more total aggression (bites, knocks and threats), than pre-exposed gilts ($P<0.01$). There were more differences between control and pre-exposed gilts in avoidance manoeuvres performed and in aggression levels experienced in the second week after mixing than in the first week. In the second week, control gilts performed more avoidance behaviours, both on interacting with resident sows ($P<0.01$) and in situations where no interaction could be detected ($P<0.05$). They also experienced more total aggression than pre-exposed groups ($P<0.01$). It appears that both contact through a gate, as in the pre-exposure situation, and full social interactions, like those during the first week, affect establishment of social order.