

AGRICULTURAL GUIDE

Published by the University of Missouri-Columbia Extension Division

Swine
management

Care of pigs from farrowing to weaning

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From birth to weaning is the most critical period in the life cycle of a pig. On the average, about two pigs per litter are lost during this period. Poor management is the major contributing factor even though the actual cause may be crushing, bleeding from the navel, anemia, starvation, or disease.

Weaning large litters of thrifty, heavyweight pigs is a key factor for a profitable swine herd. This Guide attempts to outline management practices that help keep pigs alive and profits high.

Preparation for farrowing

The average gestation period for sows is 114 days. In preparing for farrowing producers should know when sows are due. Use the gestation table to easily determine this date from the time they are bred. Identify all sows.

Be ready prior to the due date because there is some individual variation in gestation period.

Newborn pigs have a much better chance if they arrive in a clean, sanitized farrowing facility. In addition, most producers feel that a break between farrowings reduces disease buildup. However, many producers farrow continuously to maximize use of expensive facilities. For them a top job of cleaning and sanitizing must be done.

A steam cleaner or high-pressure sprayer can be

used successfully in cleaning the farrowing house. Adding a detergent helps remove organic matter. A disinfectant can be applied after cleaning. Cleaning also can be done with a shovel and broom. Floors can be scrubbed using a solution of one pound of lye and 30 gallons of water.

Some producers fumigate, especially those who have had a consistent scours problem in a central house. Directions should be followed carefully and precautions taken to avoid accidents with fumigation.

In addition the sow should be washed with soap and warm water immediately prior to being put into the farrowing pen.

Care at farrowing

Individual attention from the producer at this point pays off with more live pigs. The amount of labor available may determine how much time you spend in the farrowing house. In larger operations, one man in charge of the farrowing works well.

Having farrowing stalls or farrowing pens with guard rails, using artificial heat, and giving attention to details certainly helps cut farrowing losses. Newborn pigs are particularly susceptible to drafts and cold. A temperature of around 90 degrees F. is optimum at birth in the pig area.

Management—first few days after farrowing

There are many essential chores to be done shortly after pigs are born. The navel should be disinfected the day pigs are born, using tincture of iodine. Equalize litter size if possible. If you have several sows farrowing within a 24-hour period, pigs can be transferred successfully from one sow to another. Transfer bigger pigs in the litter, not the runts.

Clip needle teeth, being careful not to crush the teeth or cut the gums. At the same time, tails can be docked if desired. Use the same sidecutter pliers. Leave a stub on the tail about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long. Tail-docking is best done when the pigs are one day old.

Ear-notching is a good practice even in commercial herds. (See UMC Guide 2505.) This identification helps select replacement animals from top litters.

There are many good sources of iron that can be used to prevent anemia. Iron-dextran injected in the muscle is an effective method. Injections in the neck or forearm are preferred to injecting in the ham. Common levels are 150-200 milligrams of iron as iron-dextran. Pigs should be at least 24 hours old prior to giving iron shots. Don't give overdoses of iron—it may induce shock.

Iron can also be fed in the feed or in the drinking water. Supplying uncontaminated soil in the pig area is another method of supplying iron.

Checking the sow's temperature immediately after birth and each 12 hours the first two or three days is an aid in heading off problems. This has proven particularly helpful in initiating early treatment for MMA. Temperatures of 104°F. and above indicate some action is needed.

Management during lactation

Baby Pig Scours. Baby pig scours are major ongoing problems for swine producers. Most common diarrheas are caused by various strains of *Escherichia coli*, a gram-negative bacteria common to the intestinal tract of all mammals. The symptom of *E. coli*-induced diarrhea is a watery, yellowish stool. Pigs are most susceptible from 1 to 4 days of age, at 3 weeks of age, and at weaning.

Although the pig is born with very little disease resistance, this resistance increases as he absorbs antibodies from his mother's colostrum. Because the pig's ability to absorb antibodies decreases rapidly from birth, it becomes very important that he feeds on colostrum soon after birth. Colostrum provides the only natural disease protection he will have until his own mechanism for antibody production begins to function effectively at 4 to 5 weeks. Disease resistance is lowest at 3 weeks. It is wise to avoid unnecessary stress (castration, vaccination, worming) at this time.

Gestation Table
(Based on 114-day gestation time)

| Date bred* | Due to farrow | Date bred* | Due to farrow |
|------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| Jan. 1 | Apr. 25 | July 1 | Oct. 23 |
| Feb. 1 | May 26 | Aug. 1 | Nov. 23 |
| Mar. 1 | June 23 | Sept. 1 | Dec. 24 |
| Apr. 1 | July 24 | Oct. 1 | Jan. 23 |
| May 1 | Aug. 23 | Nov. 1 | Feb. 23 |
| June 1 | Sept. 23 | Dec. 1 | Mar. 25 |

*Farrowing dates for other breeding dates can be easily interpolated. For example, a sow bred Nov. 6 will farrow March 1.

In treating common scours, orally administered drugs are usually more effective than injections. You should use a drug effective against the bacterial strain on your farm.

A dry, warm, draft-free environment is of primary importance in reducing scours. Sanitation is also very important in reducing the incidence of baby pig scours.

Other diseases such as transmissible gastroenteritis (TGE) and swine dysentery may cause more serious diarrhea problems. Contact your local veterinarian if diarrhea persists or does not respond to treatment.

Castration. Boar pigs can be castrated any time before they are 4 weeks old. There is less shock on them at an early age and many producers do this chore the first week.

Creep feeding. In addition to sows' milk, pigs need a creep feed to make maximum gain through weaning. Provide a fresh creep feed at one week of age in a place where pigs can get away from the sow.

A creep ration should be high-quality complete mixed feed that is eaten readily. Good creep rations can be purchased, or mixed on the farm. When creep rations are formulated and mixed on the farm, take particular care to use a high-energy palatable mixture that meets the pig's nutrient needs.

Getting pigs to eat adequate amounts of a creep ration is often a problem. Place the creep feeder in a warm, dry, well-lighted area. Feed small amounts, and feed frequently to keep the ration fresh. Sprinkling feed on the floor or placing it in a shallow pan may help pigs start to eat. Pelleted feeds are usually eaten more readily than meals.

Weaning pigs. Where good management is practiced, pigs are consistently weaned successfully from three to eight weeks old in Missouri. Time of weaning depends somewhat on care, facilities, and production schedules. Weaning under five weeks of age requires more skill and attention. Warm, dry facilities free from draft are essential.

Pigs weighing 15 pounds or more generally can be weaned successfully regardless of age, if they are eating well. It is extremely important to have a dry, heated, well-ventilated, well-insulated house available for pigs weaned early, particularly in bad weather.

Don't start pigs in large groups. Small groups of 20 to 25 head per pen do best. Allow 3 to 4 square feet of space for each pig. Sort pigs according to size and weight.

Parasite Control. Monitor your parasite problems by analysis of worm eggs in manure and slaughter checks. Some confinement units have minimal problems with internal parasites. Several good products are available. Recommendations for parasite control are subject to change. Check carefully to see that all products used are current and that limitations on time of use prior to slaughter is observed.

Sow feeding pointers

Good nutrition is important for lactating sows. A 15 percent protein high-energy ration containing adequate vitamins and minerals is recommended. Reduce intake of sows immediately prior to farrowing,

or add bulk with one part bran or ground oats to two parts lactation ration to reduce problems with constipation at farrowing.

After farrowing, gradually increase the ration so that the sow is on full feed by seven to ten days after farrowing if she has had at least eight pigs in the litter. Feed a high-energy diet during lactation to support milk production.

Heavy milk producing sows have difficulty eating enough feed to maintain their condition. More frequent feeding, pelleting and adding fat are techniques to increase energy intake.

Summary

- Have sows and facilities prepared for farrowing.
- Be present at farrowing if possible.
- Keep pigs warm and dry.
- Process pigs early (navels, teeth, tails, castration).
- Prevent anemia—iron shots.
- Prevent scours.
- Minimize stress at weaning.
- Control parasites.
- Check sows' nutrition.

