



University of Idaho
 College of Agriculture
 Cooperative Extension Service
 Agricultural Experiment Station

Current Information Series No. 310
 August 1975

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SOW MANAGEMENT AT FARROWING

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Great reductions can occur in total cost of production, particularly in feed costs, if producers manage sow herds for maximum production. High conception rates and large litters of healthy pigs weaned are the basics to success in the swine business. Feed costs and management time soar when low-producing sows are allowed to farrow.

Feeding Sows and Gilts During Gestation and Farrowing

If you expect sows to perform at maximum production level, feed them a well balanced diet at all times. Feed sows to gain 60 to 70 lb. during gestation—or at least the weight lost during the last farrowing and lactation period. Feed gilts to gain no more than 115 lb. Both sows and gilts should be hand-fed. Feed a well-balanced diet containing 12 to 14% protein for sows, 14 to 16% protein for gilts.

Depending on individual conditions, pregnant sows and gilts need only 3 to 6 lb. of feed daily. On good summer pasture, 1 to 2 lb. will be sufficient. During winter, sows housed or penned outside will require 5 to 6 lb. of feed daily to compensate for their increased heat losses.

Avoid keeping sows and gilts too fat. Fat sows and gilts are costly to maintain and will usually have smaller litters with smaller pigs at birth. They also will crush more pigs.

Some producers increase feed intake of their sows during the last third of gestation. With a well-balanced ration, this should not be necessary. However, if your sows have not gained as much as expected during the first two-thirds of gestation, additional feed might be necessary.

About a week before farrowing, reduce feed by 30 to 50%, depending on individual conditions.

Feed Additives

Antibiotics, special feed additives, and "stress feeds" are often sold for cure-alls and are often substituted for good management practice. As a result, many producers only treat diseases instead of preventing them. We need both treatment and prevention.

Antibiotics have been extensively researched. The research suggests that significantly improved production can be expected from proper use of antibiotics in herds with a history of high disease levels.

Antibiotic feeding is frequently recommended for 2 weeks before breeding and 2 to 3 weeks after breeding. Antibiotics are also advisable 1 to 2 weeks before and after farrowing. In any antibiotic feeding program, change the type of antibiotic from time to time to insure a constant response.

In some herds, antibiotics are injected before and after farrowing to prevent uterine infections following farrowing. This practice should be adopted only on the advise of a veterinarian.

You might realize benefits from adding about 25% of a laxative feed (either bran or dried beet pulp) to the sow ration 3 to 5 days before and after farrowing. This bulky feed will help prevent constipation during confinement at farrowing.

Management of the Sow at Farrowing

Worm sows 1 month to 2 weeks before farrowing. Isolate and treat any sows showing signs of flu, pneumonia, or lameness.

Move the sow into a clean farrowing area about 3 to 5 days before farrowing and wash her with warm water and soap. Rinse with a mild antiseptic solution. You should also spray her for mange and lice.

The time between farrowing and weaning is the shortest but **most critical** period in your entire swine operation. The right kind of management, skill, and labor are needed to save a profitable number of pigs at farrowing.

Healthy sows will usually farrow without trouble. A good sized litter can be farrowed in less than 1 hour. However, some sows may take up to 5 hours. Prolonged farrowing will usually result in more weak and dead pigs. The drug oxytocin may be used to speed up farrowing. However, do not give oxytocin until the cervix is relaxed. This occurs with the birth of the first pig.

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Care of Pigs at Farrowing

At farrowing time, you should be present to wipe off new piglets to prevent chilling and to help each pig have a good chance of surviving. Sever the navel cord $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch long. This can be done by pulling or cutting; however, cutting may result in excessive bleeding. Disinfect the navel with a 7% tincture of iodine solution as soon as possible after birth.

Immediately or within a few hours after birth, clip the needle teeth of baby pigs. Clipping the needle teeth will prevent injury to the sow's udder and help prevent abrasion on the pigs themselves caused by fighting.

You should insure that each pig receives colostrum milk during the first 12 hours of life. Through the sow's colostrum milk, newborn pigs receive nutrients for early growth and antibodies for combating diseases.

If you have several sows farrowing at once, even out pigs by moving larger pigs from a smaller-sized litter to a litter with large pigs or moving some pigs from larger litters to smaller ones. Also consider moving some pigs from a poor milk-producing sow to one with a greater milking ability.

You can prevent baby pig anemia by (1) using an injectable iron at 3 to 5 days of age, (2) using iron tablets, paste, or liquid at 2 to 3 days of age repeated in about 10 days, or (3) using soil in the farrowing pen.

Inject erysipelas serum at 1 to 3 days of age. Scour problems can be reduced or eliminated with the injection of an antibiotic such as Tylan 50 or Terramycin.

When pigs are 6 to 10 days old, provide a creep ration and plenty of clean fresh water. Young pigs will not consume much feed until about 21 days of age if on good milk-producing sows.

Preventing Stress

Stress on young male pigs can be reduced if they are castrated at between 5 and 21 days of age. The pigs are also easier to handle at this young age.

Plan and arrange castrations, vaccinations, grouping young pigs, and similar handling several days to one week apart to minimize stress conditions. Reduced stress in young pigs to weaning will result in more uniform and more vigorous pigs going into the fattening pens.

Trade names are used in this publication for better understanding of the information presented. No endorsement of named products is intended nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.