



Care of Pigs From Farrowing to Weaning

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The most critical period in the life cycle of a pig is from birth to weaning. On the average, about two pigs per litter are lost during this period. Poor management is the major contributing factor, although 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 publication 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. To prepare for farrowing, producers should know when sows are due. They also need a method to identify all sows. The gestation table (Table 1) is designed to help producers determine farrowing date based on the date sows are bred.

Table 1
Gestation based on 114-day gestation time

Date bred ¹	Due to farrow
Jan. 1	April 25
Feb. 1	May 26
March 1	June 23
April 1	July 24
May 1	Aug. 23
June 1	Sept. 23
July 1	Oct. 23
Aug. 1	Nov. 23
Sept. 1	Dec. 24
Oct. 1	Jan. 23
Nov. 1	Feb. 23
Dec. 1	March 25

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

However, producers should be ready for delivery prior to the due date because of individual variation in gestation.

Newborn pigs have a better survival chance if they arrive in a clean, sanitized farrowing facility. In addition, most producers feel that a break between farrowing reduces disease buildup. Many producers, however, farrow continuously to maximize use of expensive facilities. They must do a top job of cleaning and sanitizing.

8-14	32	4.9
15-28	39	6.0
29-56	43	6.7
Total	647	100

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. If possible, equalize litter size. If several sows are 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. Best results occur if pigs are transferred the first 3 days of life and have received colostrum before transfer.

Clip needle teeth, being careful not to crush the teeth or cut the gums. At the same time, tails can be docked. To dock the tails, use the same side-cutter pliers. Leave a stub on the tail about 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. This identification helps select replacement animals from top litters and gives a check on age when pigs reach market weight.

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, usually given the first 2 to 3 days after birth. Don't give overdoses of iron because it may induce shock. Iron also can be mixed in the feed or in the drinking water. Supplying uncontaminated soil in the pig area is another method of supplying iron but is not used much in today's confinement systems.

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

Light birth weight pigs present a difficult management problem. Table 4 indicates nearly 60 percent of pigs born under 2 pounds will perish. Table 5 indicates that with extra care and nutrient supplementation, many of these pigs can be saved.

Table 4

Relationship of birth weight and survival¹

Weight range	Number of pigs	Weight distribution of population	Survival
Under 2.0 pounds	1,035	6 percent	42 percent
2.0 to 2.4 pounds	2,367	13 percent	68 percent
2.5 to 2.9 pounds	4,197	24 percent	75 percent
3.0 to 3.4 pounds	5,012	28 percent	82 percent
3.5 to 3.9 pounds	3,268	19 percent	86 percent
4.0 pounds and over	1,734	10 percent	88 percent
Total	17,613	100 percent	(Average) 77 percent

¹From *Pork Industry Handbook*, 1984 litters. Average birth weight of live pigs farrowed 3.0 pounds Iowa Swine Nutrition Herd Performance Data.

Table 5

Survival of nursing pigs dosed with milk replacers¹

Treatment	Control	Supplemented
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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 with iron shots.
- Prevent scours.
- Minimize stress at weaning.
- Control parasites.
- Check sows' nutrition.

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