Managing the Pig Herd

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Managing the Pig Herd

Studies of the cost of producing pork show considerable variation from farm to farm. This is true even on neighboring farms where opportunities appear to be equal. The only explanation that can be offered for much of this variation is the difference in the skill of the two men as managers.

Managing sows so they will produce large litters. Studies show conclusively that there is as much profit in one litter of 9 pigs as in marketing 24 pigs from four 6-pig litters.

Management during gestation, farrowing to weaning, and weaning to market requires skill and application of the operator. The following recommendations will assist during these various phases of production.

GESTATION

A balanced ration for a sow during gestation must provide nutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and minerals) for five different uses: maintain the tissue of her own body in a state of repair and functioning condition; supply energy she utilizes in her life processes; develop her unborn litter; build up her body reserves of nutrients against the severe drain of lactation; and in case she is not mature, the ration must provide essential nutrients for her own continued growth.

A net gain of 75 to 100 pounds for mature sows and 100 to 125 pounds for gilts during the gestation period is recommended.

Clean up lice and mange before farrowing—you can’t when sows are nursing pigs. You can spray safely and effectively with chlordane or lindane. Follow directions—don’t overdose.

Vaccinate for erysipelas at least 30 days before farrowing if you didn’t get it done before. Protection generally carries over to the pigs.

FARROWING TO WEANING

The most critical stage of the pig’s life cycle is from farrowing to weaning.

Keep all visitors out of your farrowing house. Post signs. Some hogmen padlock the doors. Have a footbath at the door for disinfecting shoes for those who do enter.

Clean building or stalls. Scrape and scrub dirt and manure from floors, walls, and equipment before trying to disinfect. Disinfectants work on organic matter and if it takes all the power out of a disinfectant to go through dirt it can’t kill organisms you were after in the first place. Pay particular attention around corners and other hard-to-clean areas when disinfecting.

Materials which can be used for disinfecting include:

- **Boiling hot lye water** is one of the most effective and cheapest disinfectants (1 lb. lye to 30 gal. hot water).
- **Saponated solution of cresol** is a more effective disinfectant than carbolic acid but its solubility is a rather serious drawback. Use compounds of cresol with soaps, which are readily soluble. It does not mix well with hard water. Use in a 2 or 3% solution.
- **Sodium carbonate** (washing soda, soda ash, soda crystals) is used chiefly as a cleansing agent but also has appreciable disinfecting value.
- **Sodium orthophenylphenate** is a proven disinfectant with no objectionable odor. It is readily soluble in water and is not highly poisonous. Use hot. It is most often used in a 1% solution.
- **Steam** is an effective method of sanitizing buildings and equipment, especially when one of the recommended disinfectants is introduced into steam. When used alone, steam is effective only when applied di-
rectly through a nozzle and at close range—the nozzle not more than 6 to 8 inches from the object being cleaned. It takes about 7 seconds contact with live steam to kill most organisms.

**Scrub sows with warm, soapy water before moving them into the farrowing quarters.** Bring them in 24 hours ahead of farrowing so they get used to new surroundings—it helps avoid farrowing troubles from excited sows. If a wild sow won’t settle down, try tranquilizers, but use the right dosage.

**Check during farrowing.** If a sow labors for 10 hours, she needs help. Wear rubber gloves if you pull pigs. Hormones such as pituitary extracts help sows that fail to milk.

**Pig brooders** or heat lamps as a protection measure from cold the first 2 or 3 days of life are particularly important to pigs. The temperature regulating mechanism of their bodies does not begin to function normally until they are about 2 days old. Use simple electric pig brooders extensively during cold-weather farrowing.

**Baby pig scours** (other than TGE) are best controlled by good management. Provide warm, dry bedding and draft-free stalls. Avoid sudden changes in temperature and in feed. If sows run a fever or become constipated, it can scour their pigs. If pigs break, treat with antibiotics and sulfa drugs.

**Treat pigs to prevent anemia.** Provide new sod daily, paint udder daily (½ pound ferrous sulphate crystals in 2 quarts of warm water), or give a 3-grain iron and copper pill prepared especially for this purpose or injectionable iron compounds. Use injectable iron compounds or pill at 2 to 4 days of age. Recent tests indicate that 7 days is too late. One treatment should do the job if pigs are eating a well-fortified starter feed at 2 to 3 weeks of age.

**Clip needle teeth and castrate** at 5 to 6 days of age. Small pigs are easier to handle and suffer less shock.

**Creep feeding**, beginning the first week, is recommended. Provide a creep in which the pigs can feed unmolested by the sows. A palatable, well-balanced ration containing 17 to 20% crude protein of high quality will give excellent results. Creeps that are located indoors during early spring or bad weather will give best results.

Producers who have trouble getting pigs to eat early may wish to try pelleted pre-starter with rolled oats mixed with it. Another thought is that baby pigs like a small quantity of fresh topsoil each day. Spread a few tablespoonsfull over the feed and the baby pigs may start to eat faster.

**Best time to vaccinate** for cholera and erysipelas depends on weaning age. Never do it under 5 weeks of age, or within 10 days before or after weaning. Vaccinate at 5 to 7 weeks if you wean at 3 or 4 weeks. Vaccinate at 7 to 8 weeks if you wean at 5 to 6.

Vaccinating for cholera and erysipelas at the same time saves handling, but may cause more stress. Let your veterinarian make the decision because it depends on the health of your pigs.

**WEANING TO MARKET**

You’ll have little trouble from weaning to market if you’ve done a good job up to then. During this growing period provide a well-balanced ration. In the heat of the summer provide shade and a water sprinkler system. During the winter provide dry, well ventilated quarters. Market at 200 to 240 pounds.