



## PIG TALES



John Mackinnon



Adrian Cox



Jennie Sykes



Julia James



Liz Windsor

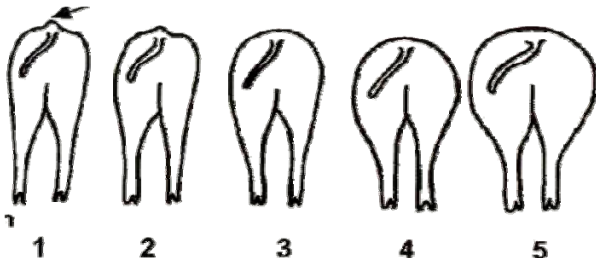
### FEEDING THE BREEDING HERD FOR OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

*Written by Jennie Sykes*

*Nutrition and feeding provide an important tool for management manipulation in order to optimise reproductive performance within a breeding herd. Nutritionists, feed companies, vets and producers spend much time debating the various merits and finer detail of different feed formulations, but the truth of the matter is that in all but exceptional circumstances the specification is adequate in terms of nutrient content and in vitamin and mineral levels.*

A major role for stockpersons on farm is to judge the interaction between the pig and its stage within the production cycle against the quality, content and intake of feed. The basic fact remains that in practice the experienced stockman will base the entire herd feeding regime on body condition and he will be prepared to be flexible in his approach to feed allocation.

#### Assessing Body Condition in Sows



##### Condition Score

1. Emaciated sow, backbone very prominent.
2. Thin, backbone prominent.
3. Ideal condition during lactation and weaning. Backbone just palpable.
4. Slightly overweight. Cannot find the backbone.
5. Body rotund, over fat.

The nutritional approach to the breeding animal is not just a simple input-output equation. Inadequate feeding can lead to delayed oestrus, lower conception rates, smaller litters and reduced weaning weights. These failings will not only affect the output of the sow, but also the subsequent growth performance of the rearing and finishing herd. The answer is to keep it simple and feed to condition at all times.

Traditionally, producers have favoured the use of a single diet for both dry and lactating sows for convenience. Before the development of the modern genotype, this worked very well and there was little to suggest that feeding two diets would give any benefits with respect to production. There have been many important changes in the characteristics of the modern sow that are heavily dependant on nutrition. These include:

- Change in body composition - higher lean:fat ratio
- Greater mature body size
- Drive in early parities to achieve a certain lean body mass
- Higher litter size and piglet growth rates
- Higher milk yields
- Reduced appetite potential
- Less flexibility in nutritional management
- Greater carry over effects from one parity to another



Dry sows should be fed to satisfy their requirements for maintenance, to correct any body condition loss from the previous lactation and to support foetal growth. Dry sow diets are typically lower in lysine (around 0.6%) and have relatively high energy content. This enables animals to decrease their potential for lean weight gain whilst promoting fat deposition and enhancing foetal growth.

During lactation, sows should be fed as much as they will eat, but there are sometimes problems if feed levels are raised too quickly after farrowing. Their nutritional needs must be met – these include the requirements for milk production whilst avoiding excess body loss. Equally, overfeeding early on will depress appetite and it will take a few days for it to recover. By this time, the full potential of lactation will have been lost and the result will be sub-optimal weaning weights. The target backfat thickness for sows at weaning is around 20-23 mm, which will equate roughly to a condition score of around 3.5. Certainly condition should never fall below 3.0 at weaning.

Feeding programmes during lactation are designed to cater for the litter being suckled as well as the nutritional investment for the next litter. The general approach is to raise feed levels on a steady scale until maximum input is achieved. This should be set by the sows rather than by the stockman and will be reached when food is left uneaten and the dung becomes soft. It is of course essential that water intake be maximised at the same time.

The exact ins and outs of feeding strategies for each farm will be different depending on the feed used, it's presentation, whether it is an outdoor or indoor unit etc... For more detailed examples of feeding strategies visit [www.stotfoldpigs.co.uk](http://www.stotfoldpigs.co.uk) or [www.gov.mb.ca](http://www.gov.mb.ca).

## [Water water everywhere!](#)

Insufficient attention is given to the importance of the ready availability of fresh water on many farms. Water performs many essential roles, which include:

1. Maintaining and controlling body temperature
2. Prevention of dehydration, constipation and renal failure
3. Transports food and waste materials through the body
4. Transport of hormones
5. Essential ingredient of important chemical reactions that lead to the production of energy
6. Used in production of milk therefore even more important during lactation

Sows that have insufficient water intake during lactation rear poorer litters and therefore efforts must be made to ensure sows drink from the moment they enter farrowing accommodation. This can be achieved by mixing water within the feed trough until 3 days post-farrowing. Water flow from nipple drinkers for sows should be 2 litres per minute. This can easily be checked using a measuring jug and a stopwatch!

