



PIG TALES



Know Your Growth Rates

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There are many reasons why pigs grow at different rates and produce different backfat profiles and to optimise economic performance it is essential to know exactly how fast pigs are growing so that necessary adjustments can be made to feeding, the environment, stocking density and so on. If there is a slowing of growth for whatever reason, pigs begin to accumulate in the system with the result that stocking density increases, eventually to a point at which the pigs' environment is compromised. Every building has a critical mass of pig weight at which this happens.

The easiest approach to understanding the growth performance of your pigs is to construct growth curves for summer and winter conditions. The protocol may seem a little tedious but in practice it does not take long and is well worth doing. If you are proficient with Microsoft Excel, the data can be processed by you, but we at Larkmead would be happy to construct the growth curves for you once you have done the weighings. A record form is enclosed for that purpose to be returned to us in due course.

1. Weighing programmes should be carried out twice, once commencing in June and once commencing in December.
2. All pigs from three litters at weaning and chosen at random at each time should be identified individually by numbered ear tags and sexed.
3. Every pig should be individually weighed at weaning and at each transfer point, including despatch from the farm. Please record the weights on the attached form. If a pig on trial dies, please weigh the carcass and record the date.
4. It is important that all pigs are weighed at the same intervals, except before sale when they are weighed the day before.
5. Growth curves will show:
 - 5.1 Weight for age.
 - 5.2 Average daily gain in each section.
 - 5.3 Cumulative average daily gain from weaning to slaughter.

Once the growth curves are constructed, pigs can be checked weighed against the curve at any time to see whether performance is as required and to monitor the effect of any changes in management or nutrition. It is also helpful to appreciate the differences in growth between hogs and gilts, as this could justify separate-sex rearing

