

Pig Fact Sheet 1

GETTING THINGS OFF TO A GOOD START

Our pig fact sheets begin with a short look at establishing the newly weaned pig. Successful weaning is essential for good growth performance and therefore reducing days to slaughter. It has been estimated that for every extra kilo live weight at weaning there is a saving of around 5 days to finishing.

Here are some basic husbandry rules:

- Use a specialist gilt ration for the first lactation and a high quality sow lactation ration subsequently. Encourage sow feed intake – in particular provide plenty of fresh clean water and as low a temperature for the sow as is compatible with piglet requirements.
- Do not wean weak pigs. The minimum weaning weight should be 6 kg and the minimum age should be 21 days. The average weight at weaning should be as heavy as possible aiming for 7-8kg. Use some high quality creep feed, even outdoors, to ensure adequate development of the full range of digestive enzymes in preparation for weaning.
- Although controversial since the emergence of PMWS, we still feel that piglets should be graded by size. This keeps stress and competition to a minimum. Keep weaners in the smallest possible groups and avoid mixing established groups.
- Provide a plentiful supply of clean drinking water for the piglets and ensure easy access to it. If you wouldn't drink it why should they? This includes piglets born outdoors as well as indoors.
- Creep and starter feeds are expensive. To maintain their freshness and maximum palatability, do not allow them to be exposed to air longer than is necessary. Keep feed bags closed, feed little and often and keep troughs clean. It is a good idea to store open bags inside clean plastic dustbins to prevent taint and access from birds, vermin, flies, etc. Floor feeding for weaners should never be used.
- Maintain scrupulous hygiene in the weaner accommodation and try to operate a strict all-in/all-out basis, or at least ensure that there is no chance of contaminating newly weaned groups with muck from older groups. There must be thorough cleaning and disinfection between batches.
- Make sure that weaners remain within their thermoneutral zone. This means that pigs must be comfortable and neither lose nor gain heat from their surroundings. As a rule of thumb, the fabric of the weaning accommodation should be at 30°C to ensure that body temperature is not used to heat the environment. Pre-heating of buildings may well be necessary, especially in colder months. In straw based systems, pre-heating of the floors may be required and pigs should be able to bury themselves in the straw.

Weaners can be protected from heat loss through the flooring by providing some form of insulation beneath them. A sheet of plywood works very well in this respect and can be removed once the pigs are established.

- Provide a dust-free, properly ventilated environment and maintain good air quality at all times. This may require a supplementary heat source in the cold or during cold weather.
- Monitor the behaviour of the weaners regularly and be prepared to adapt environmental conditions promptly if there is evidence of chilling or overheating. The only way that you can be really sure that climatic conditions are correct is by installing max/min thermometers and remembering to check and re-set them each day.
- Provide prompt treatment with veterinary advice at the onset of any diarrhoea, coughing or sneezing.