

Pig Fact Sheet 5

A BRIEF LOOK AT BATCH FARROWING

Considerable advantages can be gained through the use of All In – All Out pig management systems, even in herds of minimal disease status. The key concept of batch farrowing systems is that sows enter and leave the farrowing accommodation in set groups or batches, to allow the cleaning and disinfection of the room / paddock before the next group arrives. This leads to the production of batches of growers that are subsequently protected from contact with older aged pigs from weaning to slaughter.

What are the objectives of batch farrowing?

There are many benefits associated with farrowing sows in batches. Some of these advantages are as follows:

- Better planning and organisation of tasks – this will ultimately result in more efficient time planning and therefore reduction in labour costs. It also promotes teamwork and promotes labour efficiency, giving staff more chance to specialise in one area.
- Great health benefits. All In – All Out principles can be applied strictly on all levels of production, from farrowing to finishing – this will subsequently result in a better controlled health status through pig flow management.
- There is an increased opportunity to cross-foster piglets, as a larger number of sows will be farrowing at any one time.
- With larger numbers and pigs of a similar age being housed together, there is the opportunity for introduction of phase feeding.
- Bigger and more uniform groups of piglets and pigs – this can result in higher selling prices through less variability in pig slaughter weights.
- Batch farrowing allows optimal gilt introduction, as the mating groups are kept tight.
- Batch farrowing can be a good match for group housing systems.
- Artificial insemination can result in the introduction of improved genetics onto the farm. It will also reduce the boar requirement on farm.
- Batching allows management to have a tight control at the crucial stages of production.

Conditions for Success

To achieve success in batch farrowing a number of factors must be considered carefully:

- Although the overall resource demands don't change, there may be greater pressure at one given time on the usage of commodities such as water and electricity. For example at any one time, there will be more pigs at maximal water intake on a unit and therefore the use at peak drinking times e.g. dusk will be greater. A water flow meter can be used to ensure that the supply is adequate.
- In the outdoor situation, good paddock layout is important for an efficient, trouble-free handling system. Radial systems with central, designated service areas allow the holding of sows prior to service without any boar contact.
- Sows must be weaned in good condition to ensure that they are ready physically and nutritionally to return promptly to heat and stand for a good insemination.
- On larger units, it is important to ensure that sufficient staffing is available to cover the serving process, with serving not taking more than three hours, to avoid operator fatigue and ensure attention to detail.
- It may be difficult to accommodate returning sows if the farm is using anything other than a three-week batching system.
- Getting mating targets correct can be difficult. In order to ensure that the farrowing accommodation is full, an increased number of sows may be required to be mated in any one batch to allow for returns. This may sometimes result in a surplus of in-pig animals.

Converting to batch farrowing requires a considerable degree of planning and total commitment from all levels of staff. The change usually requires a degree of expenditure at the outset and to succeed it demands consistently high standards of management and a fully motivated workforce. If you are thinking about altering your farrowing management, consult the practice for further farm specific information. We also have some leaflets available on helping to explain this policy further. If implemented badly, batch farrowing can be a very disappointing and costly exercise!