



BREEDING

Split suckling

Split suckle for survival

Farm facts

Name: Tomos Lloyd, Hartpury College Pig Unit

Location: Gloucester

Farm size and enterprise: 60 sows, batch farrow to finish

Background

The unit farrows eight sows on a three-week batch system. With litter size averaging 13.33 born alive there are not many spare teats at farrowing! To ensure piglets get off to a good start by consuming plenty of colostrum the litters are split suckled until spare places can be found.

The system

Once sows have finished cleansing, large litters (13 or more piglets) are split suckled. To ensure minimal transfer of disease between farrowing crates, all footwear is disinfected using the clean foot dips placed in every farrowing room. The original process was for the biggest piglets to be removed from the sow and be placed into the sealed creep area at the front of the crate.

The suckling pattern during the day was as follows:

- Small piglets one hour, larger piglets one hour
- Small piglets two hours, larger piglets one hour.

All the piglets were released overnight. An added benefit of practising split suckling was that it had trained the piglets to lie in the creep area. To reduce both the time input by staff and stress on the piglets, the split suckling process was modified to remove only the largest piglets, leaving the smallest piglets permanently with the sow; there has been no difference in mortality with this modification.



Piglets become trained to lie in the creep area



Footdips are placed in each farrowing room



Split suckling ensures all piglets receive a good intake of colostrum

I have had to perfect the split suckling technique for my unit. Without it, too many piglets would die.
Tom Lloyd, Unit Manager

“I also use split suckling when there is large variation in birth weights as it allows the lighter piglets to have better access to the teats”; this is more likely to occur with older parity sows.

Split suckling takes Tom about 10 minutes per suckling shift to sort out the litters. He can continue with this technique for up to three days or until the whole batch has farrowed, when he will then foster off using the transition feeder and Nurtinger accommodation.

Benefits

- Piglets receive a good intake of colostrum
- Mortality is reduced
- Good for staff morale.

Key to success

- Motivation to reduce piglet mortality
- Ensuring co-workers understand the importance of colostrum intake
- Having adjustable lids on the creeps to allow air to circulate and prevent piglets from becoming too warm
- Having everything prepared and within reach.

Further reading

Action for Productivity 17: Colostrum – food for life

Work Instruction 16: Split suckling

Farm Case Study 1: Nurtinger intensive rearing system