



BREEDING

Night checks

Night inspections pay off

Farm facts

Name: Robin Brice

Location: Suffolk

Farm size and enterprise: 720-sow indoor breed-to-finish unit on a three-week batch system

Background

Robin is continually looking for ways to improve herd performance, achieve higher numbers born alive and reduce mortality.

The idea of introducing night checks was prompted by discussions at the BPEX 2TS Farrowing Conference, where the importance of supervision of sows and piglets at farrowing, and ensuring colostrum intake, was stressed



Robin (left) and James Brice

The system

- Robin's son, James, does night inspections two or three nights during farrowing week
- On farrowing days, evening checks are carried out up to 10:pm
- James monitors sows from 10:pm to approximately 2:am
- Regular staff come in at 4:am, which leaves only two hours of unsupervised time.

If we can keep increasing numbers born alive, without mortality increasing, then night checks will have really paid off.

Robin Brice, Farm Manager

Benefits

- Numbers born alive have increased from 11.4 to 12.34
- Pre-weaning mortality has reduced from 11.2% to 9.16% since they started making routine night inspections
- Being there to make sure piglets have a good colostrum intake leads to increased viability
- Weaning weights average >9kg and weaning stronger piglets seems to have helped keep rearing mortality low
- There is less weight variation among piglets when they go into the rearing herd
- An average 26 pigs were reared per sow per year in the 12 months through to August 2012, compared to 23 pigs in the previous year before night checks were implemented.

Key to success

- By being there at the right time it is possible to intervene early, limiting the risk of piglet suffocation during birth and reducing crushing
- Time is spent hand feeding colostrum to the weaker piglets and smaller piglets are moved on to gilts, once they've had time to suckle
- Using BPEX farrowing discs helps to keep track of each sow's progress. The farrowing disc has a simple dial that is adjusted to show the number of piglets born alive, born dead and time of the last check.



A number of farrowing discs are used so there are enough for every farrowing