



Simple shades boost reproductive performance

Farm facts

Name: TJP & AL Leddra
Location: Coates Farm, West Sussex
Farm size & enterprise: 500 sow farrow to finish, all outdoor

Benefits

- Reduced heat stress and improved reproductive performance
- A relaxed atmosphere, providing essential resting time after service

Background

Outdoor sows require facilities to reduce potential heat stress, eg wallows and good shades. Heat stress can cause serious reproductive problems 7 - 21 days post serving, causing irregular returns and reduced voluntary intake leading to body condition problems. In the breeding herd heat stress can cause farrowing rates to decline by as much as 25%, with litter size showing a drop as well. Sunburn is common in early summer and can cause pregnancy failure, pain and stress. It is therefore essential to provide shades so that sows can move out of direct sunlight.

Key to success

- It is essential for sows to stay in the farrowing huts to ensure the piglets can suckle
- The huts were moved into the prevailing breeze and back vents opened up
- Time is taken in the spring to paint the huts white to reflect sunlight and keep the temperature inside the huts down
- Ad lib feeding has been instigated to allow the sows to feed during cooler periods of the day.

“ It is important to provide for the sows' needs in the summer - and luckily it costs very little to do so.
Tom Leddra, farm manager. ”



The system

Shades were provided in the weaned and gestating sow paddocks and a commitment was made to manage the wallows better. The farrowing huts were painted white, and will be re-painted each spring, to reflect sunlight and therefore heat.



Each paddock was provided with two shades with a bed of straw underneath. The shades were made from oil drums with dry sow arcs placed on top. Once the summer is over the huts can simply be placed back on the ground. The unit had previously placed the dry sow arcs on straw bales but munching sows had left some in precarious positions!

All paddocks have good, well-managed wallows with mud the consistency of thick emulsion. After service the sows are walked back to the paddocks and will stop for a good wallow before finding their space back under the shade.

For more information on heat stress see [Action for Productivity number 4](#).