



Hands off handling!

Farm facts

Name: Fawley Farms Ltd

Location: Wiltshire

Farm size and enterprise: 750 outdoor breeding site

Background

Following a change to the farm's health plan, where the PCV2 weaner vaccine was introduced, it meant that piglets were being handled twice instead of just once. The producer decided that he wanted to devise a method for minimising the stress piglets experienced through being handled, for example at vaccination, and reduce handling.

The system

- The unit tried several prototypes, one involving a single piglet passway, but unfortunately this did not work as piglets would not move down it
- A wooden, tabletop, sorter was then developed, with bigger compartments enabling piglets to remain in groups
- After more alterations and improvements a piglet sorter built from stockboard was developed and fixed to the yard
- The piglets move into the sorter from the trailer in groups of 10–12
- They enter into pen one, where they receive their first vaccination and are marked
- Piglets then move into the second pen to receive a second vaccination and different colour mark
- Before being released from the sorter the piglets are checked and if necessary removed for any medical treatments; some can also be selected as replacement chaser boards
- The piglets then exit down a ramp and into the straw lairage
- This handling system is great for the pigs, as it significantly reduces the stress level.

Benefits

- Piglets never have to be picked up (even at weaning they are shooed from the hut to the trailer)

The system is much better for the pigs, although there are huge advantages for the staff as weaning day is much easier, it is the pigs that benefit as they are not lifted once.

Duncan, piglet sorter engineer and co-designer

- The system significantly reduces the stress piglets experience
- Staff remain in a normal standing position to do all their work during the vaccination
- As the piglets are raised off the floor it facilitates observation by stockpeople
- The system is cleanable
- It can be moved under shelter in bad weather
- The sorter has drop down flaps to provide staff with better access to the piglets
- The piglet sorter provides an efficient system for handling piglets
- Vet and Med equipment can be set out alongside the sorter ready for use, rather than having to move it around between pens
- The system also benefits staff, as the system is making labour intensive tasks like weaner handling much more efficient and less strenuous for staff.

Key to success

- Prepare the sorter before commencing tasks – make sure it is clean and that all the sections are in the correct positions
- Lay out the equipment you will be using so that it is all to hand
- Clean and disinfect after use to prevent disease spread.



Weaned piglet handling system