



St David's Pig Newsletter

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New World: Weaning expectations – 12 per farrowing place



A major change in pig performance expectations has occurred over the last few years – which are beginning to have a significant effect on commercial pig production – the possibility of weaning 12 pigs with each turn of the farrowing place.

This sea change places enormous pressure on the whole farm team's expectations.

What is the immediate impact of weaning 12 per farrowing place?

Within the farrowing area

Providing room in the farrowing area
With weaning piglets at 27 days of age there is sufficient room in the modern farrowing place to provide the extra room these piglets are going to need.

If there are concerns over space, combine litters at 10 to 12 days of age so that two litters will share the same heat pad/light area. This is fairly normal in outdoor production where piglets may run as a gang from 14 days of age. The piglets will still (tend) to run to their mum for

a drink of milk every hour. The smaller piglets will try and "steal" some extra milk.

Provide additional food where required

With weaning 12 piglets, some sows and particularly gilts, may need extra support to feed their piglets. The provision of extra milk from around day 7 might be needed to help the litter through. But limit this provision, the ideal mother is the sow and she should be encouraged to look after the piglets.

The stockperson's job is not to look after the piglet – their job is to look after mum!

Nurse decks within the farrowing area are another possibility – but hygiene is vitally important.

Look after mum

Stockpeople should value the sow and gilt more. Ensure that her comfort is assured. *Play a radio – pigs really do enjoy music!* Check the water supply at least 2x a day. Water is a critical requirement for adequate feed intake. Liquid feeding is an excellent choice during lactation.

Monitor and adjust the feeding curve. Feeding curves are essential to get the most lactating feed into sows and gilts. Add an additional 150g per day fishmeal to the gilt feed trough to provide a little extra protein and salt – she is eating less than the sow, but in addition to feeding her piglets and her body maintenance requirements, she still has some growing to do.

Reduce the room temperature to provide the ideal environment for the sow/gilt (16-18°C). A cooler farrowing house after the 1st week has two major advantages:

- Encourages lactation feed intake
- Drives the piglets into the creep area – and away from the sow thus reduces pre-weaning mortalities.

As the summers become warmer, farmers in the UK will have to start considering cooling options for their sows – drip cooling individuals or evaporative cooling for whole houses.

Space

The sow and piglets need the best flooring available. Solid floors can be a problem in the farrowing area as coccidiosis is more common with such systems.

Reduction in costs

As the table below illustrates, the increase in numbers weaned increases the value of each farrowing place:

Number weaned per farrowing place	10	12	
Dead weight	80	80	kg
Initial cost of production per kg dead weight	1.50		£/kg
New cost of production		1.34	£/kg
Cost production per farrowing place	1200	1284	£
Assuming feed costs are	65		% of total cost of production



This assumes that the “extra” piglets do not increase “fixed” costs – labour, health bills, water, electricity etc. But the reduction of cost by 16p per kg is substantial.

Pre-weaning targets

Stillborn figures

With an increase in litter size there is an increase in stillborn piglets. While the percentage may not change, the actual number will.

Pre-weaning mortality

With an increase in numbers weaned there can be a slight rise in pre-weaning mortality. However, pre-weaning mortality can be kept in check with an increase in stockmanship time which is easily paid for by the increase in piglets and weight weaned.

Stockpeople should note, however, that with small runt piglets, euthanasia may be in the animal’s welfare interests. Do not maintain poor piglets just to keep pre-weaning mortality figures in check.

With an increase in litter size to a total born of 15, there is a requirement to provide enhanced stockmanship at the time of birth. As the value of each farrowing place has increased, it is worth spending more time at each farrowing to increase the survivability of each piglet and ensure that colostrum is adequately supplied. This increases the importance of vaccination and feedback programmes.

Split suckling and individual animal care programmes are all easier when not carried out at the weekend. If weaning was moved to a Monday, the main farrowing days would be Monday and Tuesday, providing these enlarged litters which enhanced stockmanship.

Post-weaning impacts

Nursery

The increase in numbers weaned may put many nurseries into a stocking rate crisis. All-in/all-out must be maintained. There are two possible ways around this predicament:

- Utilise the passageway within the nursery. Many nurseries still have a central passageway which is unused by the pigs. The passageway area is often 10-15% of the whole nursery. Ideally during the construction this should have been of the same

flooring as the main pens, but modifying the pen layout allows the passageway to become part of the pig's accommodation.

- Streaming the smaller pigs. Place the smallest 10% of the pigs into separate accommodation. Obviously this requires the space elsewhere on the farm – but these streamed pig pens can be easily constructed. On many farms we have provided 8 weeks' worth of additional accommodation. This is to provide these pigs with additional accommodation to 30 kg. Thus the streamed pigs are 12 weeks old at 30 kg, whereas their brothers and sisters reached 30 kg at 10 weeks of age. These streamed pigs can be reintroduced into the finishing group – all-in/all-out by weight. This can reduce the spread of weights at finishing while still allowing the stocking densities to be accommodated.

Note that the increase in weaning numbers may compromise the number of drinkers, feeding space and sleeping

space and all of these facilities need to be reevaluated by the farm health team.

Finishing

The same potential issues may arise in the finishing operation. The farm health team needs to consider the implications and ensure that the environment is suitable for the extra pigs. Respiratory diseases in particular may appear to increase in prevalence, but when sufficient stocking density is provided, there is no reason why respiratory problems should increase.

Breeding and dry sow herd

If there is insufficient space in the nursery herd, the increase in weaning numbers can be used to benefit the gestation herd.

The increase in weaning numbers benefits the larger batch sizes as they can reduce the herd size but still maintain kg pork output. This will reduce costs and the carbon footprint of the herd (see examples below).

Minimal farrowings per batch	10	20	30	50	Farrowing places per batch
Current numbers weaned per batch	100	200	300	500	weaners

Example 1: With a farrowing rate of 82% and 10 weaned per farrowing place.

Minimal farrowings per batch	9	17	35	42	Farrowing places per batch
Current approximate herd size	230	450	680	1120	sows
New approximate herd size	200	380	560	940	sows
Feed saving per year	30	75	120	190	tonnes

Example 2: With 12 weaned per batch farrowing place, the impact on herd size and feed intake (at 1.1 tonnes per sow per year) becomes significant (weaners output remains the same).

Summary

There is a new world of pig production currently being built around 12 weaned per batch farrowing place. This new paradigm provides enormous opportunity for the pig industry and its advisors. There are significant advantages in cost control either through reduction in fixed costs producing finishing pigs or in feed costs by reducing the sow herd. Although many farms may capitalize on both aspects. It's exciting times ahead.



Meet the vets



Dr John Carr
BVSc PhD DPM MRCVS
DipIECPHM

John is an internationally recognised pig medicine specialist. He spent 17 years in pig practice in the UK before moving to the USA to become Assistant Professor at Iowa State University. He is based in the USA and provides international consultancy globally from Korea to Australia.

John has been involved with St David's for many years through his consultancy for the Hermitage-Seaborough group. We both saw an opportunity to develop a pig practice whose focus was pig health through understanding of the environment and pig flow.



Tony O'Loughlin
BVSc MRCVS

Tony is one of the directors of the St David's Farm Practice. He manages the practice and is in charge of the Pig Practice. He looks after the Hermitage-Seaborough boar stud and multiplier units. He has been involved locally with the Exeter BPEX pig discussion group.



Jenny Smith
BVSc MRCVS

Jenny joined the practice to do purely farm animal work. Her long term goal is to be a specialist pig veterinarian. She currently does routine pig visits and does our post mortems. She also looks after our pet pig population. She is keen to progress much further in the pig industry.



Paula Rogers

Paula joined the practice two years ago and is now the Practice Manager. She previously managed the Hermitage Seaborough boar stud at North Tawton. Hence she has plenty of experience with pig clients!

