

Farrowing Systems

Auditing Best Management Practices - Part 5



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In 2017, on-farm best management practices were audited on a total of 24 farms throughout Canada as part of a national project titled *From Innovation to Adoption: On-farm Demonstration of Swine Research*. This article is part of an eight-part series reporting on these audits.

The most critical period in the life cycle of a pig is from birth to weaning. What we do in farrowing

not only has a direct and immediate impact on piglets and their subsequent performance, but also impacts future breeding herd performance. Attention to detail quite often pays huge dividends in farrowing. When analyzing the data from the 21 audited farrowing barns across Canada, we can see that Canadian pork producers are doing an outstanding job when it comes to implementing best management practices in farrowing.

Weaning age

Results in Table 1 indicate that all of the audited farms incorporated a 3 to 4-week weaning period. Research has shown that nursery exit weights are similar regardless if piglets were weaned at 3 vs or 4 weeks of age¹.

Heat Source

Choosing the appropriate heat source is an important step in ensuring piglet survival. As seen in Figure 1, heat lamps and heat pads are utilized at a rate of 90% and 70% respectively, with a little under two-thirds of participating producers incorporating both lamps and pads. In this situation, heat lamps are typically utilized for the first number of days just after

farrowing for maximum piglet benefit. After this introduction period, heat pads would be the only heat source available in order to keep utility costs in check.

Euthanasia

As presented in Figure 2, the most common method of euthanasia is blunt force trauma, followed by the Zephyr, which is a non-penetrating captive bolt. Approximately three-quarters of the farms audited received a 'partial compliance' score, strictly due to the fact that blunt force trauma and CO₂ inhalation are ranked as 'conditional methods' within the 2014 Code of Practice (page 61, Appendix N – Methods of Euthanasia).²

Creep Feeding

According to the data in Table 1, approximately 90% of farms audited utilize some type of creep feeding strategy during farrowing. Most producers generally implement creep feeding 5-7 days prior to the anticipated weaning date. Research has shown the provision of creep feed in the farrowing room did not affect piglet body-weight at weaning, regardless of weaning age (3 or 4-week weaning). However, the provision of creep feed in the farrowing room did improve performance in the nursery for piglets that actually consumed creep feed. The challenge is that only 4 to 40% of pigs consume it.³

"Provision of creep feed in the farrowing room did not affect piglet body-weight at weaning, regardless of weaning age."

The manner in which creep feed is presented to attract piglets could be improved as a whole (Figure 3). Research has shown that piglets are observed at a significantly higher frequency at the tray feeder compared to the standard feeder. In addition, this different presentation of creep feed appeared to numerically increase the percentage of piglets per litter showing evidence of creep feed consumption.³

Conclusion

Overall, pork producers are doing a good job of staying on top of those key management issues that ensure optimal performance is achieved within the farrowing unit. Attention to detail is critical, especially in farrowing as it can have subsequent impacts in other areas of production.

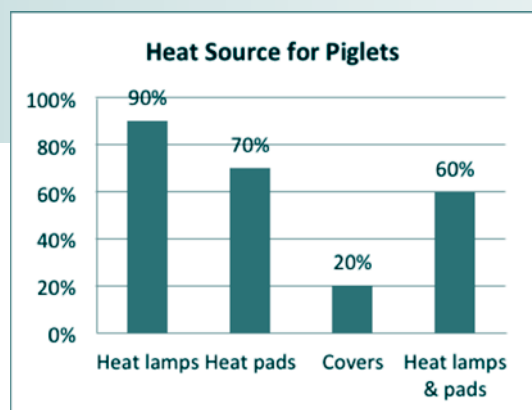


Figure 1. Heat source for piglets in farrowing rooms

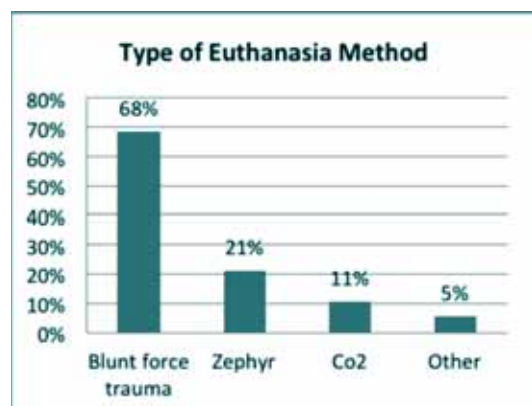


Figure 2. Type of Euthanasia method implemented on-farm

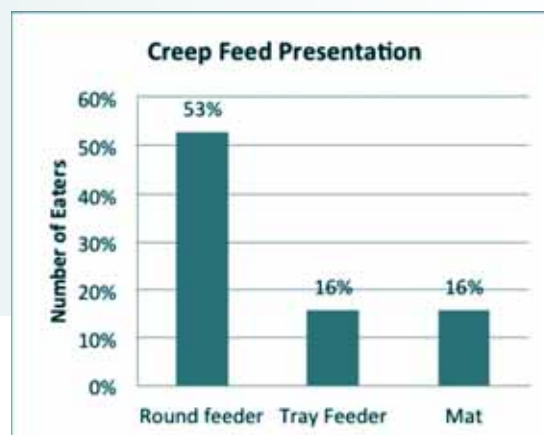


Figure 3. Type of Creep Feed Presentation

For Further Reading

- 1 Creep Feeding in the Farrowing Room: Do the Outcomes Depend on Weaning Age? (English) <http://www.prairieswine.com/creep-feeding-in-the-farrowing-room-do-the-outcomes-depend-on-weaning-age/>
- 2 Code of practice for care and handling of pigs (Français) http://www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/porcs_code_de_pratiques.pdf (English) http://www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/pig_code_of_practice.pdf
- 3 Increasing Creep Feed Intake by Stimulating Exploratory Behaviour using Enrichment (English) <http://www.prairieswine.com/getting-more-piglets-interested-in-creep-feed/>
- 4 Castration and tail docking of piglets (Français) <http://www.cdpq.ca/getattachment/Recherche-et-developpement/Projets-de-recherche/Projet-222/PQ-Decembre-2016-Bien-etre.pdf.aspx>



Table 1. Audit results for 21 farrowing facilities

Category	Average Percentage of Farms		
Weaning age (weeks) It is recommended to wean piglets at 19 days of age or more.	100 %	0 %	0 %
Additional heat source, piglets It is recommended to install heat pads and covers for piglets in the farrowing crate.	71 %	29 %	0 %
Pain control used in piglets⁴ The use of analgesics is mandatory for castration and tail docking.	76 %	10 %	14 %
Euthanasia method used Pig must be rendered immediately insensible - must not return to sensibility prior to death.	24 %	76 %	0 %
Pen dimensions Pen dimensions of 6' x 8' receive a compliant rating, and 5' x 7' receive a partial compliance rating.	43 %	57 %	0 %
Feeder dimensions It is recommended that feeders in farrowing crates be more than 12 inches wide.	90 %	10 %	0 %
Creep feeding used The use of creep feed is recommended.	89 %	11 %	0 %

Legend : Meets recommendation Partially meets recommendation Does not meet recommendation