

Good Colostrum Management for Pigs: Compiled by AHDB Pork

Introduction

Ensuring that piglets receive colostrum dramatically increases their chances of survival later on in production, as well as reducing the need for antibiotics **#ColostrumIsGold**.

Why is colostrum so important?

Colostrum is the first milk that is secreted by the sow after farrowing. It is a rich source of nutrients and provides essential antibodies (immunoglobulins) that provide protection against disease causing bacteria and viruses. Piglets are born with very few of these antibodies and they can only be derived from colostrum. It is also essential for natural development including weight gain and temperature regulation making it vital for piglet survival.

Colostrum Intake

Piglets consume anything from 200g/kg-450g/kg in bodyweight of colostrum and these simple steps will help ensure piglets (no matter the size) are getting their fair share.

1

Timing is everything – After the first 30 minutes of life piglets will start to become cold so getting the piglets to suck as soon as possible is essential. Check on farrowing sows every 30 minutes, guide piglets to her teats if required (assisted suckling) and make sure that all teats are functioning. Milk let down occurs frequently (every hour) but only lasts for 15-30 seconds so stimulation e.g. piglets nuzzling the teat is important to increase milk volume.

2

Environment – Piglets are susceptible to cold stress therefore, keeping the farrowing pen warm and dry is essential. The creep should be kept at 28°C to 32 °C preventing hypothermia. Make sure piglets are laying under heat lamps, if not move them to the heat source. Keep farrowing pens clean, dry and disinfected. This helps to avoid microbial growth that could cause infections to the litter and sow. Reducing conditions such as scour and mastitis, metritis and agalactia (MMA) the need for antibiotics is also reduced as well as improving production and colostrum intake.

3

Even Litter Sizes – Where the litter size exceeds the number of teats available aggression and competition can occur. This means potential damage to the teat and weaker piglets will be pushed out. Methods of adjusting litter sizes include synchronised farrowing's, split nursing and cross fostering. Where possible cross fostering should be avoided as this is a stressor, however, if necessary it should be completed as soon as possible after farrowing. Split nursing involves separating the litter, allowing smaller piglets to feed first and stronger piglets separated and kept warm within the creep for up to 2 hours.

Also remember to continuously check the health and behaviour of the sow and litter, check for struggling piglets and for any environmental issues which could impact the sow and her piglets.

References

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