



Season 6, Episode 7: Takeaways from the Second International Conference on Pig Livability

Dr. Joel DeRouchey, Kansas State University, and Dr. Edison Magalhaes, Iowa State University, share key insights from the 2nd International Conference on Pig Livability, highlighting economic trends, practical management strategies, and research-driven approaches to improving livability.

Background

Pig livability continues to be a central focus in commercial production as mortality remains costly across all phases. To address these challenges, the second International Conference on Pig Livability brought together producers, veterinarians, researchers, and allied industry professionals to share new data, evaluate current practices, and highlight strategies that improve survivability and herd resilience.

Industry Benchmarks and Early Conference Themes

Day one emphasized the economics of livability and the performance gap between high- and low-mortality systems. Comparisons with Brazil, where labor availability is higher and PRRS is absent, showed the impact of strong day-one pig care, consistent farrowing assistance, and early management.

Companies also shared how Pig Livability research has informed on-farm changes, including assigning dedicated sow-care staff to identify and assist at-risk animals, an approach that significantly reduced sow deaths in several systems. Genetic companies discussed ongoing work to select for resilience using commercial data, along with interest in PRRS-resistant pigs as a long-term disease-mitigation tool.

Labor, Early Pig Care, and Technology Integration

Labor availability remained a major theme. Brazil's ability to staff farrowing rooms at levels nearly double those in U.S. systems demonstrated how additional labor supports improved split suckling, early piglet checks, and more consistent intervention. U.S. systems shared how technology, including barn-environment monitoring, feeding software, and integrated herd-health data, is helping offset labor shortages by enabling earlier detection of issues and more informed decision making.

Breakout Session Highlights

The breakout sessions covered all phases of production. The *Breeding Herd Mortality* session emphasized that most sow deaths occur near farrowing, with retained piglets and gastric disorders remaining the leading causes, prompting discussion on farrowing management, oxytocin use, and heat stress mitigation. The *Pre-weaning Piglet Mortality* session highlighted the importance of early pig care, structured piglet checks, and targeted intervention for lightweight pigs. In the *Post-weaning Mortality – Nursery* session, speakers focused on improving early feed intake through tools such as group feeding, mat feeding, and close monitoring of fallback pigs. The *Post-weaning Mortality – Finishing* session outlined updated data on transport losses and managing health challenges, including an example where a production system significantly reduced PED outbreaks after adopting full trailer sanitation.

Key Takeaways for Producers

Speakers challenged traditional practices that provide limited benefit, including routine split suckling and pig drying, urging producers to invest labor only where it meaningfully impacts survivability. Across all sectors, the strongest message was the need for integrated data, clearer priority setting, and management strategies that fit each operation's unique structure. With sow herd expansion limited across the industry, improving livability is becoming the primary lever to increase pig output, making research-driven decisions more important than ever.

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