



# Newborn Piglet Principles

Becca Walthart, Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Swine Medicine Education Center

## TAKE HOME MESSAGES:

1. Provide piglets a warm, dry, and draft free environment with proper colostrum consumption to ensure their survival and maximize their growth potential.
2. Cross-fostering piglets from litters that are larger than the sow has teats for, to sows with smaller litters can improve growth potential.
3. After processing, supply a dry, clean area for piglets to lay.

## Piglet Environment

The piglet's environment is a critical factor for developing a healthy wean pig at 21 days old. The thermal neutral zone of a piglet is 90-95 degrees Fahrenheit, though the sow's thermal comfort zone is 60-65 degrees Fahrenheit. (Zhu et al.) If a piglet's environmental temperature is less than this, the piglet may experience hypothermia, becoming susceptible to starvation and disease, and could be crushed as it is driven for warmth to huddle against the sow. To avoid these risks, supplemental heat is provided through heat lamps (Figure 1) or heat mats (Figure 2) etc.

Figure 1: Nursing Piglets in Farrowing under Heat Lamps



Figure 2: Nursing Piglets in Farrowing on a Heat Mat. Swine Medicine Education Center



Drying piglets after birth by either using a towel or drying powder is another technique to ensure the piglets stay warm and dry as they are susceptible to chilling.

## Colostrum Management

Colostrum is the first milk produced by the sow within the first 24 hours after farrowing. Colostrum contains warmth, vital energy (high fat), and important antibodies and immune cells that help build a strong immunity. Colostrum consumption is the main component of piglet survival.

Caretakers can improve colostrum intake to the piglets in a litter by using a technique called split suckling, demonstrated in Figure 3. Split suckling is when part of the litter, usually the largest, strongest, and firstborn piglets, are removed from the sow for one to two hours after they have had a chance to receive an adequate amount of colostrum. (Reese et al.) This technique allows the smaller, more recent-born piglets a chance to receive an appropriate amount of colostrum.

Figure 3: Example of Split Suckling Piglets  
AMVC Management Services, Dr. Katie Beckman



## Cross-Fostering Piglets

Cross-fostering is a technique that occurs when piglets are between 24-48 hours old. Piglets are removed from their dam (sow) and placed on another dam to allow each piglet access to a functional teat. For example, if a sow has fewer piglets than teats, she will gain piglets through cross-fostering from a sow that has had more piglets than her teat count. (Reese et al.) It is important to make sure piglets receive colostrum from their dam before being put on a different sow. Cross-fostering is determined by individual sow teat count, which takes place when a sow enters the farrowing room. Her teats will be counted and recorded to determine how many piglets she can successfully nurse.

## Processing Piglets

Piglet processing typically occurs 1-3 days after birth. This includes procedures such as:

- Tail Docking
- Iron Administration
- Castration
- Treatment, as needed

Tail docking is the process of removing part of the tail to reduce tail-biting occurrences in the nursery and finisher.

Iron supplementation is necessary with confinement-raised piglets because they are born with an iron deficiency due to minimal iron transfer across the placenta from the sow. Piglets born outside do not need iron supplementation due to access to iron within the soil. Castration is a procedure that surgically removes the testicles of male piglets. This avoids boar taint in the meat and reduces aggression towards caretakers and pen mates. After processing, piglets are placed in a dry, clean environment to avoid the risk of infection or disease.

REVIEWER: Dr. Chris Rademacher

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