

Dr. Kara Stewart, Purdue University, shares her insight on the importance of colostrum intake and management skills, and how to help piglets survive.



Colostrum

Colostrum is milk produced by the sow at the end of gestation. It is in the teats when the piglets are born. Colostrum contains all the important nutrients a piglet needs to survive after birth. It is only produced for the first 24 hours, with the composition changing throughout those hours as it turns to whole milk. Outside the basic nutritional needs of the piglet, the most important component of colostrum is immunoglobulin, disease protection. Also, there are still several bio-active factors being researched.

Immunoglobulin and fat

Immunoglobulin is considered the most important part of colostrum because sows do not pass down immune defense well when compared to humans. Therefore, piglets must obtain colostrum to receive antibodies and strengthen their immune system. Fat is the second most important component of colostrum due to the warmth and energy needs of the piglets. Piglets come from the warmth of the sow into a cold barn when born. Therefore, Dr. Stewart emphasizes how important fat content is to keep them warm, as well as burn for energy to help them find the teat. Dr. Stewart's research has shown the content of colostrum is not equal in every sow and components vary by litter.

Identification of adequate colostrum

Dr. Stewart discusses her group's research into identification of adequate amounts of colostrum per piglet. This research requires swabs of the vagina be collected. Cellular samples from the vagina are analyzed for colostrum makers. They have identified markers for different lipids and proteins.

Management to increase colostrum

Piglet management at birth is one of the most important practices when trying to increase the piglet's chance of survival. Attention to birth order and weight are important when figuring out which piglet has had enough colostrum, might not have gotten any or not gotten an adequate amount. Drying the piglets is another simple, but important, management practice to help increase colostrum intake. Split suckling is another way to help improve colostrum intake and can be done in two ways. Remove the largest piglet from the teats and into a warming box and allow the smaller ones to get their colostrum, or allow the first born to get the right amount of milk and then remove them into the warm box to allow those born later to get theirs. Dr. Stewart emphasizes the greatest chance to increase piglet survivability is making sure people are present in the barn during farrowing to help assist in any sow or piglet needs that may arise.

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