

Season 1, Episode 3: A Discussion with Dr. Tim Loula & Dr. Marlin Hoogland: Getting Pigs Started in the Nursery

Dr. Marlin Hoogland, Smithfield, and Dr. Tim Loula, Swine Vet Center, discuss the importance of reading the pig and how to set your nursery up for success.



Transportation

Thirty-five years ago, farrow to finish operations were housed all on one site. The nursery was usually next door and required no transport, following weaning of pigs. Since that time, operations have moved to multi-site systems and pigs are transported a significant distance during the nursery transition. In many cases farrowing operations are located in a separate state from the grow-finish barns. It is important to pay attention to every step of the transportation process. With smaller and unthrifty pigs, the attention to detail during transportation can be the difference between life and death. Trailers should be continuously monitored for temperature and ventilation. Every step of the transport route should be planned out. Ventilation and insulation should be adjusted depending on the time of year. It is important to reduce and eliminate chilling on pigs.

Preparation and reading the pig

The nursery should be set up many days in advance of pigs arriving. Brooders and the heat micro zone should be set up a full 24 hours in advance. Chilled pigs do not take off eating as quickly as those that are warm, dry and comfortable. Stringent biosecurity should be followed between turns of pigs, this includes power washing, disinfection and drying. Feeders should be clean, dry and stocked with quality feed. Barn ventilation should be fine tuned to prevent drafts while still providing clean and fresh air. When pigs come in to the nursery, make sure to observe behavior. Pigs should not be huddling together or piling. Each production system has a set of temperature guidelines to follow in the nursery, but it is important to read the pigs and assess their level of comfort. Pigs coming to the nursery with a health challenge may require a warmer environment compared to those who come in healthy. When setting up a barn, it is helpful to have solid sides near sick pens to better control temperatures.

Feed and water

Pens should be set up so pigs have easy access to feed and water. Mat feeding is recommended when pigs first come in to the barn, this stimulates pigs to get up and find feed. Mat feeding should be offered four times per day. Use feeding time as an opportunity to observe which pigs are not actively seeking feed, because those pigs are ones you should pay special attention to. Gruel feeding is another strategy recommended when pigs first arrive in the nursery. This feeding strategy provides a softer more flavorful option to help nursery pigs transition from milk to solid feed. Gruel feed should be around 2/3 water and 1/3 feed and can be offered two times per day, with dry feed offered during the other two daily feedings.

Details

It is all about the details. Operations that do not pay attention to the details when starting pigs off in the nursery can expect 2-3% more mortality with healthy groups and 5-10% more mortality when an unthrifty group of pigs comes in. From day one, focus on getting the highest percentage of pigs on feed as possible. You only get one chance to start pigs off right in the nursery.

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