

Dr. Chris Rademacher, Iowa State University, and **Dr. Steve Pollmann**, DSP Consulting, discuss stocking density, the importance of weaning age, and staying ahead of issues such as feed outages.



Stocking density

Stocking density is a measure of how much floor space is allocated for each animal in a facility. It is very important to consider how well you are utilizing the available space in each barn. For example, do not leave pens empty while crowding others. Overcrowding can lead to increased vices, reduced weight gain, and increased mortality. A 0.5 square foot increase in space per pig can improve livability by up to 1.5%. Research has shown, the two most linear factors of mortality are stocking density and age at weaning.

Weaning age

European systems are weaning pigs at 28-32 days of age. Traditionally, swine production systems in the United States were weaning at 14-17 days of age. This was primarily done to improve pigs per sow per year, however it resulted in reduced livability and growth rates. Currently, the systems here in the United States are moving towards weaning at 23-25 days of age. 70% of overall production cost is in the grow to finish phase of production. If your operation is struggling with grow-finish mortality, increasing weaning age may be one method to improve livability. When setting performance incentives for your operation, consider using a whole system approach versus incentivizing sow farms and grow-finish separately. Separating incentives, by phase of production, could lead to issues in a downstream portion of your system. For example, encouraging sow farms to only focus on pigs per sow per year could result in reduced weaning age when pigs are coming in to grow-finish.

Details

Dr. Rademacher stated, production is all about the details. One crucial detail is monitoring for feed outages. Number and timing of feed outages should be recorded every day. Each individual pen should be monitored for feed delivery. In one antibiotic free system, half of a barn had a feed outage where the other half did not. This barn experienced an E. coli break, and the side that had maintained feed intake did not experience the same level of E. coli challenge as the side that had feed outages. With the implementation of precision technology, we can more quickly identify and address issues such as feed outages.

Takeaway messages

Dr. Pollmann emphasized the use of real time indicators and technology as a management strategy. Using these indicators to address issues early rather than waiting for closeout information is very beneficial. Dr. Rademacher stressed the importance of having outside personnel evaluating your farm and tracking feedback in a computerized system. This information can help pinpoint areas of change that can be addressed straight away to improve outcomes of your operation. Caretakers need to be engaged in the process and understand why daily tasks are important to overall success. All of this starts with a consistent and effective leadership team.

To Listen to this full podcast please visit: <https://globalagnetwork.com/pigx/podcast/season-2-ep-6-stocking-density-general-mortality-part-2>

