

## Season 2, Episode 9: Survivability and the Sow

Dr. Ron Ketchem, 30 & up Consulting LLC., discusses the importance of data collection, as well as sow care strategies to improve sow and piglet survivability.



### ***The value of data***

Dr. Ketchem began working for Swine Management Services in 2000 and co-owned the company starting in 2002. Benchmarking of many sow farm programs, during his time, led to a database of more than 1.8 million sows. This sow database allows for standardization, as well as comparisons within a single company and across the database as a whole. Today, in this database, the top 10% of sow farms have death losses averaging 8.5%.

### ***Pedicures for pigs***

There is no question Dr. Ketchem is passionate about the importance of toe and dew claw trimming in sows. Clippers should be used to trim toes back to 50mm, or three fingers, from the hairline. Dew claws should be trimmed back to the coronary band, this can be done in the farrowing crates. Regular trimming helps ensure even weight distribution which reduces foot pad wear and hoof cracks. As a result, infections that can lead to sow mortality or euthanasia are minimized. One farm reduced sow mortality 3% by trimming toes and dew claws.

### ***Causes of mortality***

Dr. Ketchem categorizes sow mortality into six areas: locomotion, disease, intestinal, reproductive, performance, and other. Of these, locomotion injuries and related mortality tripled from 2005 to 2016, now one of the primary reasons for culls and mortality.

### ***Where should you focus***

Gilt selection and development are critical. Get gilts on farm earlier, while culling out unsound animals. Trimming feet is important to all successful sow programs. Nutrition that fits your developing gilt program, productive sow requirements, and addresses the quality of the toes and dew claws should also be of focus. One feeding strategy that can be implemented, the last couple days before farrowing, is to meal feed every 3-4 hours. This helps boost a sow's energy level, which can result in shorter time to farrow and reduce stillborn piglets. For smaller farms that do not have overnight labor available in the sow barn, this feeding strategy can be a huge advantage.

### ***Industry changes***

In the future, with group housing of sows, Dr. Ketchem foresees wider implementation of electronic sow feeding. This will allow for body condition checks and eliminate sows competing for adequate nutrition. He has concerns regarding Proposition 12 and what it will mean for sow and worker welfare as well as sow performance. For example, the ability to restrain a sow in distress during labor provides safe access for a worker or veterinarian to assist and care for the animal. Ultimately, we need to keep in mind our goal which is to provide high quality protein to the public at a reasonable cost.

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