



Season 3, Episode 4: Individual Sow Care

Dr. Chris Rademacher, Iowa State University, Dr. Justin Brown, Iowa State University, and Dr. Pete Thomas, Iowa Select Farms discuss the concept of individual sow care and tips on how to implement it on your operation.

Sow Mortality

Sow mortality is a costly issue for the swine industry in the United States. In recent years, sow mortality is also becoming more of an issue in other countries. Since 2014, sow mortality has been rising linearly, increasing 0.75-1.0% year over year. Three primary causes of sow mortality have been identified. This includes labor downers, prolapses and sudden or unknown deaths. Pelvic organ prolapse (POP) is often one of the most accurately identified causes of mortality, because it is easily identifiable.

Individual sow care

It is important to evaluate the status of every sow every day, especially during breeding and gestation. Treatment outcomes are more successful the earlier a sow is identified as ill or lame. Labor is a limiting resource on nearly every farm. Early identification of sows needing treatment results in reduced mortality and decreased time spent removing mortality, which can be a significant labor commitment for a full-grown sow.

Commercial trial

Collaboration among the commercial swine industry and academia is critical to successfully addressing the issue of sow mortality. Iowa State University veterinarians in combination with Iowa Select Farms staff evaluated every sow every day for a two-week period. Since sows are fed once per day, this opportunity was used to identify sows who did not rise to eat. A note was made on sows not standing to eat. Those sows were then evaluated and treated if necessary. After two weeks the Iowa State University staff left and the Iowa Select farm staff continued identification, evaluation and treatment. Data was collected over a 24-week period and results showed a 4.25% reduction in annualized sow mortality. This trial was conducted in a pen gestation system, but additional trials are being done to evaluate effectiveness in group housing systems as well.

Execution and implementation

Basic husbandry is a critical part of any successful sow operation. Making daily sow observations a focused task is important for proper implementation and reduction of mortality. There is always an abundance of daily tasks, but providing a consistent message to staff on the importance of daily sow observations is critical. Incentives for reduction in mortality can help provide staff with additional drive to evaluate every animal every day. The time required to evaluate every sow every day easily pays for itself over time. In the future, advancements in technology may also assist with the labor required to check every animal every day.

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