

## Season 3, Episode 8: Survivability and Stress Alleviation

Dr. Christine Mainquist-Whigham, Pillen Family Farms, and Dr. Chris Rademacher, Iowa State University, discuss how to improve pig survivability by getting back to the basics and evaluating management practices.



### ***New approach***

It can be difficult, but there is tremendous benefit to taking a step back to evaluate long standing practices and procedures. In 2016, Pillen Family Farms implemented an elimination diet approach. They pulled medication and a handful of other staples out of their diets, in order to get back to the basics. Interventions were then added one at a time, to properly record and assess the impact each had on survivability and growth. Production records were used to measure parameters such as mortality, feed conversion and feed intake. It is important to use as many barns or pigs as possible to increase the validity of such evaluations.

### ***Management practices***

When implementing new management practices, it helps to have buy in across the entire employee and management chain. Even basic management practices, such as sanitizing between groups, should be evaluated. When an alkaline detergent was utilized to remove biofilm, prior to power washing and disinfecting, immediate benefits were noted. Biofilm was removed, enteric challenges were decreased and the time it took to power wash was reduced. In the nursery, a 1.15% drop in mortality was observed when a detergent was introduced. Vaccination timing is another area that should be considered. For example, moving a vaccination to the sow farm, rather than mid-nursery, can reduce stress on the pigs and labor required. Mortality, feed intake, feed conversion and gain were all improved when Pillen Family Farms altered their vaccination schedule to be done at the sow farm rather than mid-nursery.

### ***Technology***

Technology, such as cameras, can provide a view of pig activity and behavior when caretakers are not present. Observing pig laying patterns can help gauge environmental temperature. If pigs are completely bunched together, they may be chilled and if they are all spread out, they may be overheated. Ventilation should then be reviewed based on these observations. Interestingly, humidity and barn temperature were elevated when a caretaker was present. This elevated humidity and temperature may lead to over correcting ventilation while choring, possibly resulting in chilling of pigs once caretakers are no longer there.

### ***Back to the basics***

Covering the basics of feed, water and air every day is so important. Reading the pig can help you make necessary adjustments within the barn. If you try a new management practice, make sure to document those changes. Less is more and doing the simple things right every day goes far. Getting a group of pigs started off right will greatly reduce challenges in the finisher. Reduced health challenges leads to fewer medications needed, benefiting the pig and your bottom line.

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