

Appendix 9: Sample Farrowing Standard Operating Procedure

Proper management during and post-farrowing requires keen observation skills, knowledge of the pig's behavior and environmental needs, patience, and attention to detail.

Pre-Farrowing:

The pre-farrowing period is the time to prepare the facilities and sows for the birth of piglets. Sufficient time must be provided in the production schedule to make these preparations thoroughly.

Prepare the farrowing quarters:

- Clean and disinfect the farrowing rooms thoroughly before placing sows, including floors, crates, feeders, walls, fans, and lights. Ideally, the room should stand idle for a day or two to allow complete drying before sows enter.
- Check for worn or sharp edges that may cause injury. Check to see that waterers are functioning properly. Adjust size of crates to accommodate the females that will be housed in them.
- Outdoor reared - pre-farrowing preparations involve moving farrowing huts to a new, dry location and providing ample bedding material for the sow to create a nest. Ample use of bedding provides a cleaner environment and allows sows and piglets to create a micro-environment.

Prepare the sow for farrowing:

- Allow sows time to become accustomed to the farrowing stall – four to five days is recommended. Gilts that have never before been exposed to the farrowing equipment can learn how to maneuver in the farrowing crate and operate feeders and waterers.
- Sows must always be handled gently with great patience. Use slow, deliberate movements around sows and minimize loud noises. Be certain that distractions like equipment, shadows, slick floors, spilled feed and drafts are removed before moving sows from one location to another. Never beat a sow to move her, rather use gentle persuasion and patience. **NEVER USE AN ELECTRICAL PROD TO MOVE SOWS!**
- Check heat lamps, heat pads, radiant heaters to ensure proper functioning beginning 24 hours before expected farrowing.

Farrowing:

- Frequent, attentive observation of sows is important to predict when farrowing will occur. Accurate predictions of the time of farrowing will help ensure that the environment is ready for arrival of the piglets.
- Signs of impending farrowing include: nest building; increased restlessness of the sow; a firm, swollen udder; milk that can be squeezed from teats; increased respiration rate from about 25 to 75 breaths per minute; twitching of the tail; and expulsion of blood-stained fluids. The most reliable and easily observed signs are milk in the teats, increased respiration rate, and expulsion of blood-stained fluids from the vulva. The decision to intervene in the farrowing process is often a difficult one to make.
- If farrowing process is not progressing smoothly, determine if the sow has not finished farrowing. Evaluate the “fullness” of the sow’s abdomen, the number of piglets she has, and the quantity of placenta produced in determining if the sow has completed farrowing. Assuming she is not done farrowing, three of the most common signs include: 1. One or more piglets are present but labor stops for 45 minutes or more; 2. The sow is laboring (straining) but no piglet has been born for at least 45 minutes; and 3. All piglets are dry and the attendant is quite certain that more pigs are to be born.
- Contact barn manager for instructions on how to proceed and refer to SOP on difficult farrowing.

Piglets:

- It is critical that newborn piglets suckle promptly to receive a healthy dose of colostrum. Colostrum contains the protective antibodies needed by the piglet. Piglets should receive colostrum within the first 12 hours of life.
- Observe piglets for signs of chilling.
- Piglets are usually processed during the first day of life (clipping teeth, docking tails, clipping the umbilical cord, identifying piglets, treating splay-legged pigs, and providing supplemental nutrients). Some producers choose to delay some of these practices until the piglet is older and stronger or they may not perform some practices at all.
- ***Clipping needle teeth:*** The newborn piglet has eight needle teeth located on the sides of the upper and lower jaws. Many producers clip these teeth within 24 hours after birth to reduce the chance piglets will lacerate each other and/or the sow’s udder. Teeth should be clipped using a sharp side cutter so that only one half of the exposed tooth is removed.
- ***Docking tails:*** Tails are docked to practically eliminate tailbiting. Most purchasers of weaned pigs and feeder pigs require tails to be docked. Tail docking should be done within 24 hours of birth when it is least stressful on the piglet for these reasons: the piglets are small and easy to hold; at this age littermates are less likely to investigate and bite a newly docked tail; the piglet

and farrowing quarters are still relatively clean; and the piglet is well protected with antibodies from the colostrum of the sow. Tails should be docked about one inch from the point where the tail joins the body. Docking too short might lead to rectal prolapses or rear leg paralysis in later life. Use a disinfected side cutter to dock tails. A specially designed, heated cutter that will cauterize the wound can also be used successfully. Very sharp instruments should be avoided because of their increased potential to cause excessive bleeding.

- **Supplemental iron:** Injection of iron is preferred over oral administration because iron is poorly absorbed from the piglet's digestive tract. Injectable iron products are available in both 100 and 200 mg of iron/cc concentrations. Iron dextran is one of the most common products used. A single injection of 200 mg of iron before three days of age is sufficient to prevent anemia. Iron injections should be administered in the neck muscle behind the ear. Iron should not be injected in the ham as damage to the sciatic nerve may occur or the muscle may be stained which will reduce quality of the ham at slaughter. Stretch the skin before injecting iron then release the skin after injection. This practice will help prevent the iron from leaking out of the injection site. Do not overdose with iron as too much iron can be very toxic to the piglet.
- **Identification:** Piglets may be identified in some way at processing. In commercial settings, identification usually takes the form of ear notches or ear tattoos. Animal care workers need to carefully identify piglets as poorly placed notches or tattoos are difficult to read when pigs get older.
- **Castration:** Castration is best done when the piglets are relatively small and before 14 days of age.
- **Creep feeding.** Creep feeding is recommended beginning at about 10 days of age for piglets weaned at three weeks of age and later.
- **Water:** Piglets should have access to a source of water.
- **Euthanasia:** Check with barn manager.