

Pig Improver

Colostrum Management

Makes the Difference: For More Piglets and For Better Piglets



The importance of colostrum for the health of piglets is unquestioned. Colostrum provides energy and hydration to maintain vital bodily functions. It also provides protection against pathogens through local immunity (digestive) and systemic immunity. Pre-weaning mortality (PWM) continues to be one of the main challenges for the producer's financial bottom line. Research shows that an amount of 200 cc of colostrum on day one increases survivability of piglets born in the 2 to 2.5-pound range (0.9 to 1.1 kilo) by 4 to 5 times (Ferrari et al (2014)).

One of the challenges is how to increase the number of piglets that get enough colostrum to thrive when born in large litters and/or for piglets born lighter than their littermates. "Different types of colostrum management are available to assure proper colostrum intake,"-says Mauricio Gonzalez, Technical Services Manager at PIC. "Producers should proactively consider what kind of colostrum management they are capable to implement consistently over time."

1: Split-suckling

Split-suckling is the best method in terms of implementation and manpower needs. For split-suckling, a large litter is divided into two halves after farrowing is completed. Groups are separated for 90 minutes, and the smaller piglets are able to nurse with little competition. Split-suckling is commonly used for large litters, with more piglets than functional/milking teats. It is also useful for litters with uneven birth weights where the small-medium piglets are under a clear disadvantage to find a teat and to keep it when having competition.

Some tips:

- Move off the first/largest 5 to 7 piglets born to let the smaller ones nurse without competition
- As stated previously, not 100% of the litters born will require this support
- Wait until 15 or more piglets are born before starting split-suckling
- Never take piglets off the sow while she is still farrowing

Organization is key: make two daily rounds each day -- one early in the morning for litters born overnight and the second round for litters born during the day

2: Udder Training

The second option is udder training. The piglets are taught how to drink from the teats. Basically, hold piglets on the teats until suckling behavior is established. This must be done within 30 minutes after birth and if necessary, a second time 60 minutes after birth. Focus on piglets that weigh between 2 and 3 pounds at birth. It is important that the interval between birth and udder training is as short as possible.

Some tips:

- Mark piglets as they are born
- Choose the proper teat
- Execute udder training within 30 minutes after farrowing
- If necessary, repeat at 60 minutes after birth
- The goal is to have piglets drinking colostrum milk on their own after the intervention

3: Colostrum manual collection and administration

The third option for colostrum management is manual collection and administration. It is a method that requires more manual work than the other two options. In practice, this process currently requires too much time and effort to likely increase dramatically in use. Therefore, this option is limited to farms with a lower number of sows per full-time equivalent employee. For this method to be successful, it is important to identify the right sow and piglets to be collected and administered, respectively.

For colostrum collection, choose sows that are in parity 3 to 5. The best teats to collect are the first three pairs of teats. Avoid small ones. Collect the colostrum 1 to 3 hours after the first piglets are born. Collect for 30 minutes after an injection of oxytocin (use only under

appropriate local health and management standards). Take a good look at the teats: a good quality teat is long, has good mammary gland development and wide teat space. A medium quality teat has short teats, but with good mammary gland development.

The next key is to select the piglet(s) that will be provided colostrum. The most important ones are those that are chilled and/or have empty bellies. Another option is to identify piglets that were born between 2 and 3 pounds, but are struggling to get started. Although colostrum can be provided for up to 24 hours after birth, it is preferable to be provided within the first six hours.

When providing colostrum, the type of nipple used can greatly impact the desire of the piglet to express suckling behavior. The right size, hole and softness is important. Delivery will take 1 minute and 40 seconds for one delivery of 30 cc. The volume should be about 30 cc per pig, per time. If the piglet is small, provide the most you can up to 30 cc without spilling colostrum; piglet suckling behavior will be a key for successful delivery of the targeted quantity. From our experience, there are practical limitations when providing more than 30 cc for the piglets as they will show reduced suckling behavior and tend to get lethargic.

Some tips:

- During collection, use a bottle with a wide cone to avoid spilling of colostrum
- Do not waste time on sows not producing enough colostrum to collect
- Consider 15 to 20 sows to collect 1 liter (1,000 cc) or 1 quart of gallon of colostrum
- Consider 1 hour to collect 1 liter or 1 quart of gallon of colostrum
- Collection will usually take 2 minutes for 30 cc

Gonzalez continues: “Proper colostrum management makes it possible for every pig producer to improve their biologic and economic results. Remember that PIC Technical Services staff are available to help you with these or any other topics related to management, farm flow, stocking density and other important husbandry factors.”

Together we can maximize the long-term health and productivity of your herd. Our future – and yours – has never looked so bright, as PIC continues to deliver on our promise to Never Stop Improving.