

H32 – Focus points: Day 1-5 after farrowing - loose sows



All piglets nurse

Help sow and piglets to a good start on lactation

1. Sow and piglets must be inspected minimum once a day by a member of staff in whom they trust.
2. Finish nurse sows and crossfostering according to the recommendations applying to traditional farrowing pens. Move as few pigs as possible.
3. When handling piglets, cover the entrance to the creep at a point when all piglets are in the creep.
4. Be aware of the sow's protective behaviour when you perform tasks in the pen. Always make the sow aware of your presence and assess whether it is safe to enter the pen.
5. Mark pens housing aggressive sows and make a note in the sow log.
6. Only walk into the pen if absolutely necessary. The sow must be disturbed as little as possible.
7. Pay attention to the sow's health, thoroughly follow H15 – Disease and treatment of sows.



Unthriving piglets, lying by the udder even though the sow is not lactating.

Inadequate management

- Increased piglet mortality the first days after farrowing.
- Many piglets are moved later than one day after farrowing; this will lead to some piglets not getting milk, more fights for teats and agitated sows chasing the new piglets.

Additional comments - Focus points: Day 1-5 after farrowing - loose sows

- 1.** Pay attention to the sow's appetite and note whether it allows the piglets to nurse and if the piglets seem calm. Check that all piglets come to the udder and get a teat. Treat sick or lame piglets. Sows react to the staff in pen, and it is therefore recommended that the same staff member handles the same routines after farrowing as before farrowing. Piglets in pens with loose sows spend more time with the sows the first few days after farrowing than piglets in traditional farrowing pens and it is therefore particularly important that they get the energy via the milk required to stay warm.
- 2.** Loose farrowing sows have more piglets than they are able to rear and therefore crossfostering and nurse sows are required. Piglets are ready to be moved when they have had sufficient colostrum intake (antibodies), ie. after 12 hours with their own mother. When a piglet is moved to a new sow, it may be several hours before it starts nursing.

Move as few piglets as possible as loose sows may bite foreign piglets or move away from foreign piglets trying to nurse. Move weak pigs to a foster sow, also if more than one day has passed since farrowing.
- 3.** Sows may become aggressive if piglets are taken from the pen while are next to the sow, whereas the sow will rarely notice if piglets are lifted out of the pen from creep.
- 4.** No two sows are the same, and if a sow is taken by surprise by the staff it will by instinct protect the piglets and perhaps chase the person out the pen. When the sow knows that someone is about to enter the pen, assess how the sow might react. If the sow shows signs of aggression by speeding towards the pen entrance and making warning sounds, postpone your task. Alternatively, confine the sow to the crate or let it into the inspection alley while you work in the pen.
- 5.** Aggressive sows can be identified in various ways: a coloured dot on the forehead of the sow; a plastic tube on the handle of the gate, or a note in the sow log so that all staff members can see it. Aggressive behaviour typically abates in time after farrowing and is not a behaviour limited to loose lactating sows only. However, when an aggressive sow is housed loose the staff is not as protected against pushing and biting as they are when sows are confined in a crate.
- 6.** Do not stress the sows by unnecessary visits in the pen, foreign routines or noise in the farrowing facility the first days after farrowing when the risk of crushing peaks if the sow moves. Talk to the animals to let them know that you are around so that the sow is not frightened by your appearance by the pen. Perform routines such as castration and administration of iron after day 2 after farrowing.
- 7.** Sick and weak sows are at increased risk of crushing their piglets. If a sow has a low milk yield and the piglets are hungry, they tend to stay closer to the sow and udder, and when the sow rolls over or lies down several piglets will be at risk of crushing. The sow must be well and attentive to its piglets.