

H7 – Colostrum for all piglets and nurse sow for underweight piglets

Colostrum provides antibodies to newborn piglets against herd-specific diseases and of the first vital energy.

This piglet must be moved to a nurse sow

Sows provide sufficient amounts of colostrum when they are healthy, well immunised and optimally fed.

In large litters, split-suckling can help assure the smallest piglets of colostrum. This is particularly relevant if some time passes from farrowing is complete and until crossfostering takes place.

1. Smallest piglets (below 700 gram)

- 1-2 times a day, collect the smallest piglets and place them with a nurse sow for underweight piglets.
- Place 14 piglets with the nurse sows, regardless of milk cup system. If some of these piglets die within the first 48 hours, new piglets can be added.
- Correct lying behaviour among the smallest piglets is obtained by the right temperature: use eg a heat lamp with 150/175 W, extra curtains, creep boards etc.
- Destroy piglets that are not able to suckle after receiving heat and energy!
- If there are not enough small piglets to make a nurse sow, collect the smallest piglets and place them with one sow
- Small piglets must have easy access to water, eg water line in a trough that all piglets are able to reach.



Fact

Colostrum provides immunity and energy to piglets. To be assured of immunity, piglets require 10-15 ml colostrum depending on its size. The first 24 hrs after birth, piglets need the energy contained in 200 ml sow milk.

2. Remaining piglets (above 700 gram)

- Piglets have had sufficient colostrum intake when the umbilical cord is dry – typically 8 hours after birth
- Piglets can be moved to another sow when they have taken in sufficient colostrum.

Fact

An optimum nurse sow for underweight piglets is currently farrowing or finishing farrowing, ie it still produces colostrum. The sow has small teats that present well to the piglets.

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1.	Prepare thoroughly for crossfostering, for instance by counting the piglets when you confine them to the creep during feeding. Divide the count into normal piglets and piglets below 700 g.
1.	If more than 5% of the liveborn piglets weigh below 700 g, you may need to take a look at other parameters in the herd (eg feeding during gestation).
1.	Sows produce colostrum for 24 hrs after birth of the first piglet. A nurse for underweight piglets is ideally a sow that is currently farrowing or that has just finished farrowing and is thereby still producing colostrum. The sow should have small teats that are easily accessible for the piglets. If at all possible do not use gilts as nurse sows for underweight piglets as they may lack certain antibodies against some of the herd-specific diseases. The piglets of the nurse sow must be assured of colostrum from their own mother or from another sow that is still producing colostrum.
1.	Newborn piglets must not be exposed to hypothermia. Prevent this by placing the smallest piglets under a heat source.
1.	You can also move weak newborn piglets weighing more than 700 g to a nurse sow for underweight piglets.
1.	When the piglets have learned to use the creep after approx. 1 day, place a board in front of the creep to raise the temperature in the creep.
1.	Water in a trough can also be used as an indication of the sow's milk yield. If the piglets do not drink from the trough the first two days after crossfostering, it is a sign that they are drinking by the sow.
1.	Split-suckling: confine the largest piglets in the litter in the creep for 20-30 minutes to allow the 10-12 smallest piglets in the litter access to the udder.
2.	Do not move the piglets from the sow too soon. Identify the newborn piglets in the litter on your evening round. These piglets will be ready for crossfostering the following morning.
2.	Only colostrum produced by sows and gilts in the herd protects piglets against herd-specific diseases such as necrotizing enterocolitis or erysipelas. Sows must either have had these diseases or be vaccinated against them to be able to form the correct antibodies. Diarrhoea outbreaks in gilt litters may be attributed to the gilts not having had a certain diarrhoea disease.
2.	Sows excrete colostrum during farrowing. The piglets take turns searching the udder and taking in colostrum. If a piglet fails to get to the udder, you must help it. Research shows that 2 hrs after birth of the individual pig, 70% (2 in 3) of the piglets have sufficient amounts of antibodies in the blood. 8 hrs after birth, this figure has increased to 95%. It is therefore recommended that all piglets stay minimum 8 hrs with their own mother/a sow that has recently farrowed and that is producing colostrum before being moved. A piglet's navel is dry after roughly 8 hrs, and this may be an indication that the piglet can be moved.
2.	Cow colostrum does not contain antibodies against necrotizing enterocolitis, erysipelas, coli diarrhoea etc. Cow colostrum as a powder can only be used as a source of energy.
2.	Spend your time providing energy to the piglets to make them suckle rather than spend time expressing colostrum and feeding this to the piglets.