

H30 – Transfer of loose sows



The sow must adapt to the new surroundings and to visits in the pen

Thoroughly prepare farrowing

1. The pens must be completely dry after wash.
2. Transfer the sow approx. 1 week before expected farrowing. Mark the pen if the sow exhibited aggressive behaviour during the recent lactation.
3. Provide nesting material from transfer until farrowing.
4. Walk into the pen every day. Take a handful of hay/straw and give it to the sow.
5. Perform the daily routines in the same manner every day.
6. Daily remove manure from the pen.
7. Turn on the heat lamp before farrowing starts (see H13).



Sow and equipment are dirty, and low level of hygiene in the pen.

Wet pens at or after transfer of sows

- Poor immediate environment for sow and piglets.
- Cold piglets off to a bad start in life. They are slow in getting to the udder and start nursing.
- A cold udder stresses the sow and may lead to chronic mastitis.

Manure in pens

- Increases infection pressure.

Feed leftovers/caking by the trough

- Poor level of hygiene, increased infection pressure and reduced appetite.

Additional comments – Transfer of loose sows

Recommendations for management of traditional farrowing pens are also applied in herds with loose sows in addition to actively seeking to build a good relationship between sows and staff. It is much easier for sows to display normal behaviour in a pen where it is loose; aggressive and agitated sows after farrowing must be handled before farrowing.

Partially slatted floor increases the risk of mess in a pen where the sow is able to move around. Consequently, pens and sections for loose sows must be designed to encourage natural dunging behaviour on the slatted floor. It is natural for sows to defecate in areas that are already wet.

1. It is crucial that the pen is completely dry. Wet and cold areas in the pen may cause the sows to defecate in the lying area and rest on the slatted floor. If the sow has defecated by the creep before farrowing, there is a risk that the piglets may do so also.
2. Sows adapt to the surroundings and feed before farrowing, and the aim is calm sows during and immediately after farrowing. According to legislation, sows must be transferred to the farrowing pen no later than 3 days before expected farrowing. Information of sows with a history of aggressive behaviour during the recent lactation must be available to the staff in the facility.
3. Straw as nesting material satisfies the sow's need for nesting behaviour. It will be calmer, in particular in the first part of farrowing, if straw was available for nesting. Research shows that nesting material in the form of straw may lead to shorter farrowing and fewer stillborn piglets.
4. Sows become familiar with the staff and visits in the pens before farrowing – touch the sow and scratch it when you enter the pen. Hay/straw is only supplied in the trough or on the floor to prevent the sow from pushing the staff to get more.
5. Fixed routines will make the sows more calm as they become familiar with the daily routines and will therefore not be surprised by the work in the farrowing facility. There risk of crushing piglets is high the first few days after farrowing and the sows should therefore ideally lie down calmly for long periods at a time – also when the staff is working in the pen.
6. Sows may change their preferred resting and dunging areas just before farrowing resulting in manure in several areas of the pen.
7. Newborn piglets need a warm environment. Recommended temperatures are guiding and any adjustments must always be based on the piglets' temperature.
Temperature requirements of newborn piglets in the creep are 34-36°C. Temperatures below this will cause a drop in the piglets' body temperature; experience shows that after 2 hrs on a cold floor, piglets' body temperature drops and the risk of disease increases significantly.
Inlet and reflux temperatures can be recorded with an infrared thermometer. The difference must not be more than 2-3 degrees. It is important to keep the creep dry, warm and free of draught before farrowing to make it an attractive area for the piglets between nursing.