

Full stomachs at slaughter

A recent lament from an abattoir could help producers save money.

The complaint was that full stomachs in finisher pigs were causing problems on the slaughter line. A full, bulging stomach is difficult to avoid with a knife during the dressing process leading to cases of carcase contamination, while it is also physically difficult to lift a heavy alimentary tract out of the carcase leading to carcasses having to be detained. It was estimated that some stomachs contained 4-5kg of food.

This is food wasted.

To take an extreme example (with rounded up figures to simplify the calculation), if a farm produces 200 slaughter pigs per week and all of them contain 4kg



of undigested food costing £280/T, the loss is over £11,000/year in feed waste. Admittedly the 4kg is likely to be excessive (since this is about the total daily intake of a finisher pig) and probably includes a significant amount of water, but there are potential savings to be made.

The solution is to starve pigs overnight before sending them in. This is not easy unless sending a whole pen. Re-starting feeding in a part-emptied pen with limited hopper space may lead to fighting, as may mixing pigs into a feed-less holding pen overnight. However, in a yard situation it should be possible to draw pigs into a fenced-off area of the yard away from the hoppers, although they must still have access to water.

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Quick reminder on summer infertility

Analyse last years performance to predict drops in fertility and ensure that you organise extra replacements before your anticipated service dates.

Acidifying drinking water

Adding organic acids to water can be a useful tool in the control of intestinal disease in weaners, especially *Salmonella*. Recommended dilutions are given for the acids, and the aim is to achieve a pH of around 4. However, a recent case has shown that standard dilutions do not always achieve the desired effect. The only way to get it right is to test the pH of the water coming out of the drinkers. pH meters can be bought, or samples can be submitted to Beeford laboratories for testing, to make sure your pigs are getting the most benefit from acid.

Congratulations to the following stockpersons who recently passed their National Proficiency Tests in Stage 2 Pig Production.

Ryan Wilson employed by Mr R Buckle, Out Newton, East Yorkshire.

Mark Denness, Holme-on Spalding Moor, East Yorkshire

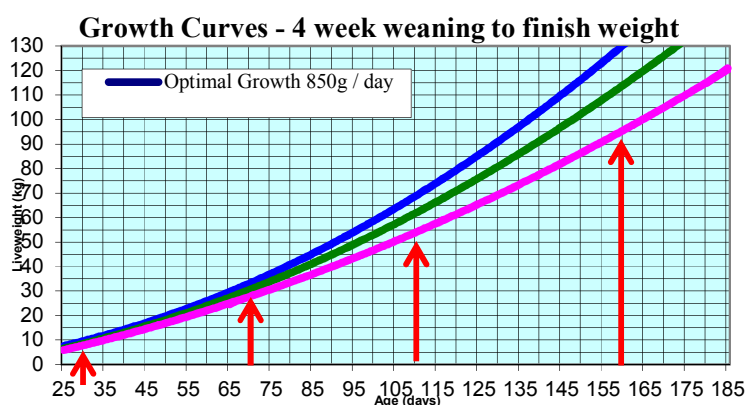
Michael Jones, employed by Smith Brothers, Singleton, Lancashire



Going for growth rate

Following on from the last newsflyer in which the importance of growth rate in pig production was discussed, part 2 of the article looks at ways of measuring and improving growth rate.

Measuring growth rate



The growth curves show optimal, good and typical UK, performance. The red arrows indicate points in time which can be used as check points to ensure pigs are growing to the target performance levels (see table below).

Typical and target weights from weaning (kg)	Weaning (28 days)	10 weeks (70 days)	15 weeks (105 days)	22 weeks (155 days)
Typical UK (680g/day)	7	27	45	90
Good	8.5	30	55	107
Optimal	9.5	34	65	118

Measuring weight for age

A number of techniques are available to enable measurement of weight-for-age. The less sophisticated ones require more effort but are less costly while more automated methods require minimal effort but are more expensive. Some literally involve 'spot-checks' whereas others are 'real-time' and produce data on an on-going basis direct to a computer.

1) Routine weighing

This simply involves weighing a representative pen of pigs on a regular basis (eg: every one or two weeks from weaning to finish) then plotting their weight and age on a growth curve as shown above. Pigs can be either weighed individually or in groups on a platform weigh-scale.

2) Girth band measurement

By measuring the girth of a pig behind the front legs and around the shoulders, then combining this with the same pig's weight, an equation can be derived for that particular genotype of pig. Approximately 40-50 pigs should be measured initially at 8-10 different ages in order to get an accurate profile of the pigs. Trials with our clients' pigs have shown 98.5% accuracy when predicting weight from such girth measurements. Once the equation is set then all that is required are a snout snare and a tape measure. This is a good method for multi-site yarded systems as it is quick and easy to do with minimal bio-security risk.

3) In-pen weighers



Schippers in-pen weighers provide continual real-time measurements involving typically 90% or more of the pigs on a daily basis. Average pig weights and growth rates are readily calculated or plotted as the data can be wirelessly streamed to a computer or logger. Pigs can be automatically spray-marked if required to assist selection for sale. Approximate costs are £2300 for the grower pig weigher and £3200 for the finisher weigher. Ideally the weigher is fixed in specific pens to sample weigh one pen from a typical batch of pigs.

(Picture from Tom Allen)

4) Auto-sort system



The Warkup Pro-sorter[®] system weighs pigs up to four times per day, which yields a large amount of information on growth rates, and can also segregate pigs into three different weight groups enabling the most appropriate diet to be fed in relation to their body weight. The Pro-sorter can also predict the numbers of pigs to be sold, select them at specific weights and shed them into a holding pen ready for loading.

(Picture from AM Warkup)

In summary, knowing how your pigs are performing at specific stages of production enables prompt corrective action to be taken.

Quite simply, if you ain't measuring them then you ain't managing them and they're costing you money.

Fly Bite Condemns are costly!

Over the last few weeks there has been a rise in the numbers of cases of fly bitten carcasses seen at the abattoirs. This can be costly due to the further processing required. Mild cases are estimated to cost £7/pig, moderate cases £12/pig and severe cases £22/pig. Fly bites are not only costly on the pocket but also remember that flies can transmit diseases among pig populations as well as being a nuisance to the pigs themselves. The Environmental Agency has published a fly management guide which can be viewed at:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/permitting/36414.aspx>.

The BPEX Action for Productivity 36 on Insect Control can also be viewed at the BPEX website.

Creep Feeding

Convincing suckling pigs to take their first steps towards weaning by eating creep feed can be a frustrating business. The latest science and technology may produce the perfect early nutrition, but if the little blighters won't eat, what can you do?

The vets at Garth were recently presented with some data that may help. The figures showed firstly that new diets can encourage pigs to eat from a surprisingly young age, and secondly that existing targets for pre-weaning intakes are probably far too high.

The latest speciality creep diets are 60% milk-based which make them very palatable for baby pigs and not at all unpleasant for a group of peckish vets in a meeting room! The particular diet we tried is designed to be fed from 4 days old, but it must be fed in a clean trough or dish two or three times a day in small amounts to ensure it is fresh and appetising. To help the freshness it should be stored somewhere cooler than the 18-20°C of the farrowing house. The post-weaning diet should be blended into the creep gradually from about 4 days prior to weaning.

Traditionally a creep intake of around 500g/pig by weaning has been targeted. The feeling has been that there is no benefit if this figure is not achieved. Since intakes rarely reach these dizzy heights there is generally a lack of motivation on farms to put much effort into creep feeding.



However, recent trials have shown that a creep intake of around 250g can lead to reduced pre-weaning mortality (resulting in an extra 0.4 pigs weaned per litter) and increased weaning weights. It also leads to a reduction in post-weaning scour as the physiological changes necessary to cope with a purely solid diet at weaning are at a more advanced stage.

It is generally accepted that heavier weaning weights result in improved performance throughout the rearing and finishing stages. However, a direct comparison between a traditional creep feed and the new high spec version found that there was surprisingly little difference at weaning but still a benefit in post-weaning performance (ADG, Feed intake, FCR) all the way to slaughter after use of the new diet.

As for feed intakes immediately post-weaning (which are usually negligible), it is worth noting that a pig weaned into a nice pen and kept on its own eats well. Therefore, low post-weaning intakes are not a problem with the pig, but a problem with how we keep and feed them.

This new information provides food for thought on farrowing house and weaning management. A little attention to detail with creep feeding should reap longer term production rewards.

Legislation reminder - Use of electric goads

Using electric goads to aid with the moving of pigs is not strictly illegal, but there are restrictions in law on **how** they are used. Pigs must only be shocked once, only on the rump, and only if their ability to move forward is unimpeded.

Their use is completely prohibited, however, under the Red Tractor farm assurance scheme. In paragraph AH.1.4 of the Red Tractor standards is the following sentence: **The use of electric goads, sticks and pipes for handling stock is not permitted.** It goes on to say that **electric goads must not be present on farm.** Please ensure that all staff are aware of these requirements to avoid any contravention of both the law and your assured status.

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