

Snatch-and-Save Baby Pig Program

The most critical period affecting the survivability and early growth of the baby pig is during and immediately following birth. Newborn pigs are vulnerable to chilling and rapid loss of energy reserves. This quickly weakens the baby pig and interferes with its ability to receive adequate 'first colostrum' from the sow. The amount of 'first colostrum' consumed by newborn pigs depends on birth order, viability of individual pigs, litter size and competition, chilling, etc., yet adequate intake of 'first colostrum' is critical to survival.

Production records from many sow units in the U.S. indicate a combined stillborn and pre-weaning mortality of 20-30%. Management techniques that focus increased attention on sows and pigs during the farrowing process have been shown to reduce pre-weaning mortality and stillborn rates by 5-10 percentage points. Providing immediate warmth for newborns and enhancing consumption of the 'first colostrum' by all pigs will improve survivability and early growth.

The Snatch-and-Save baby pig management program described below integrates key management techniques to reduce pre-wean mortality and stillborn rates. This outline is an example protocol as suggested by Dr. Dale Hendrickson DVM, Stoney Creek Veterinary Clinic.

1. Synchronize farrowing as early in the morning as possible (preferably at 5:00 AM to 6:00 AM). This can be done with a Lutalyse injection to induce sows and gilts to farrow 1 to 2 days early. Actual farm and individual animal gestation lengths differ, so this will require adjusting the inducement day to match individual farm conditions.
2. Attend farrowings for a 10-12 hour period each day. Every sow should be observed at least every 5-10 minutes.
3. Prepare 'hot boxes' with 4 inches of bedding (do not use pine shavings). Boxes may be plastic or stainless steel. The number and size of the boxes will depend on the number of sows farrowed per week and the space available in the farrowing house. Boxes should be numbered. Boxes should be cleaned and disinfected daily. Heat lamps should be placed over boxes to maintain temperature at 85-90°F.
4. Behind each sow, place a farrowing card containing a numbered space for each potential piglet born (1-15). As each pig is born, fill in the time of birth on the card beside the piglet number. If a pig is stillborn, record as stillborn and note the time. Record all other events on the card, such as oxytocin injections, pulled pigs, etc.

5. Snatch (remove) pigs from sows immediately as they are farrowed. Give pigs all processing injections. This may include Naxel, iron, penicillin, etc. After the injections are given, place pigs in Box #1 until full, and then move to Box #2. Pigs will be randomly added to boxes from litters depending on order of farrowing. This means litters will not be kept together.
6. If the sow does not farrow a pig every 20-30 minutes, give ½ cc oxytocin. Record injection time. If the sow does not give birth to a pig within 5 to 10 minutes after the oxytocin injection, then intervene the farrowing process by attempting to pull pigs. Treat all sows with injectable antibiotic that are entered manually by farrowing house personnel. Do not treat the sows until the farrowing process is complete.
7. If a sow does not start farrowing within 30 hours after the induction injection, then give 1½ cc of oxytocin to induce farrowing. If a sow does not start to farrow before the farrowing house employee leaves for the day, then start the farrowing induction process over again by giving Lutalyse.
8. When a sow is finished farrowing (passed at least 50% of placenta), give 1 cc of oxytocin. Place a processed group of the oldest pigs from the hot boxes on the sow. Processing may include clipping tails, clipping teeth, castration, and ear notching. Place at least one more pig than the current herd litter average born alive on each sow. Put big pigs on older sows and small pigs on gilts. Overload litters of smallest pigs < 2.5 lb of birth weight by 25% because 25% of small pigs will not survive.
9. Process unattended litters that farrow during the night as soon as possible. Leave these litters intact except for sizing of large or small pigs. Do not cross foster these pigs to sows that farrowed the previous day. Transfer only after pigs receive early colostrum.

Remember, these guidelines are designed to save more pigs, resulting in increased breeding herd efficiencies. For a 1200 sow unit with a combined stillborn and pre-weaning mortality rate of 20%, reducing mortality by five percentage points will result in an extra 0.5 pig/litter weaned, or 1320 pigs per year.