How to feed piglets weaned at 3kg

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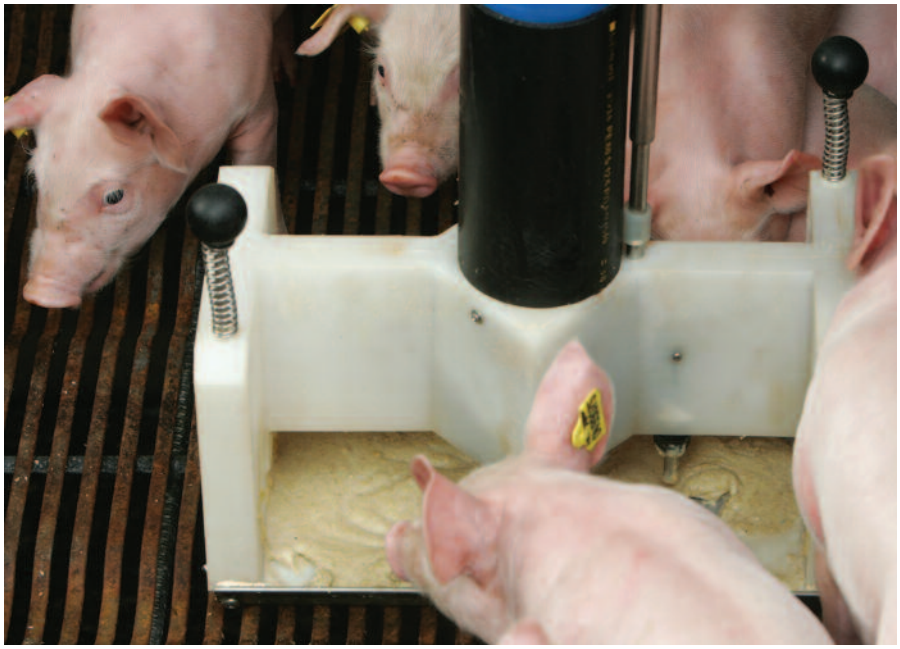
Every year the number of piglets live born per litter is increasing mainly due to genetic improvements.

For example in the Netherlands in 2007 sows produced 12.8 live born piglets per litter. Nowadays, however, the best farms produce, on average, 13-14 live born piglets per litter. In more and more cases there is a risk that one or two piglets in a litter suck an unsuitable teat or even that there are more piglets than teats. This results in an unnecessary higher mortality and more light or runt piglets at weaning.



Specialists in feeds

Denkavit are specialists in feeds for young animals and they have developed a special feeding system to handle this upcoming problem. This system is based on the product Denkapig Baby Wean, which is a piglet diet fed as a dry meal or liquid porridge characterised by a very good acceptance and digestibility. It can be used as a creep feed before weaning, but the strongest effects are seen when applying it to piglets weaned at 3-6kg.

When piglets are weaned at 21 days they should weigh on average about 6.0-6.5kg, but the lightest piglets weigh only 3-4kg. These piglets should be paid extra attention. They are put in a separate pen and provided with a special diet to have a boosting start at weaning.

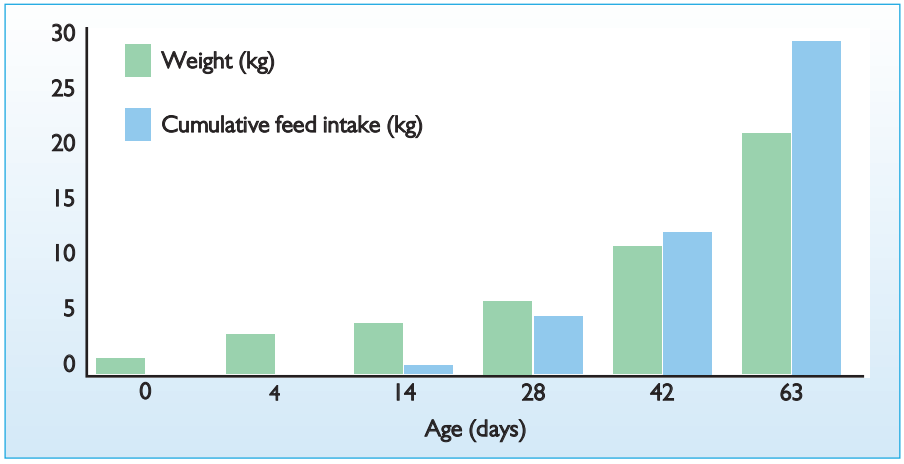
When after weaning a dry feeding system is used, the light piglets should be provided with Baby Wean 2-3 times per day as a liquid in a separate trough simultaneously to the normal dry weaning diet.

After weaning, when liquid feeding is applied to all piglets, an extra trough with Baby Wean as a dry feed should be provided for the light piglets 2-3 times per day.

In both dry and liquid feeding systems Baby Wean should be given for 3-5 days until a maximum intake of approximately 200g per day to stimulate piglets to also eat the normal weaning diet, which eases the transition to this diet later on.

Therefore, the number of eating places on this extra trough should be sufficient to allow piglets to eat simultaneously. To further stimulate the intake of Baby Wean after weaning it helps to provide it in the same form (dry or liquid) before weaning. When preparing Baby Wean, 1kg product should be mixed with 1.5 litres of water. This can be done in a bucket or a calf milk mixer.

Fig. 1. Results obtained at the Denkavit research centre.

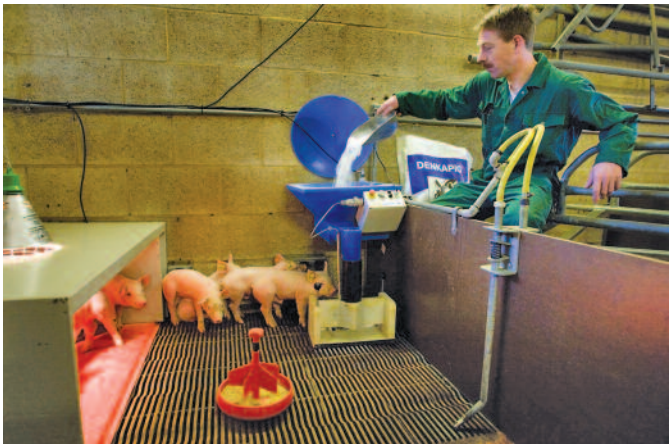


Advanced feeding

A more advanced way to provide liquid Baby Wean is by using a liquid feeding machine like the Mambo machine. It can provide frequent small fresh quantities of porridge to 20-40 piglets in a pen.

Results obtained from the Denkavit research farm showed that the lightest piglets weaned at 20 days (weighing 5kg),

Continued on page 12



The climate and management of the unit can be specially adapted to the needs of the piglets.

Continued from page 11
are able to consume approximately 400g per day of Baby Wean on average during the first week after weaning, indicating that with the right feed and management for the light piglets the whole group gets more homogeneous.

Instead of trying to compensate for a too low sow milk intake before weaning by giving a special diet after weaning, it is highly preferable to prevent these light piglets occurring by using a special weaning system.

Piglets with a good body condition are early weaned from a selected sow at approximately 2-3kg live weight.

This weaned sow receives the light piglets from the other sows in the same farrowing room, which otherwise would not get enough milk.

The early weaned piglets originating from the selected sow know each other and stay together. They are transferred to an empty farrowing pen where a warm nest is created. It is important to have sufficient floor space with only a solid floor in the nest. If there is a solid floor outside the nest, piglets could lay down there and spread faecal droppings inside the nest. The nest should have a warm floor and a heating lamp to ensure an environmental temperature of about 30° inside the nest. The advantage of this system is that all sows and piglets can remain housed in the same room (internal biosecurity).

Alternative to foster sows

This system is a good alternative for foster sows. Although at first glance it seems more expensive, when taking into account the extra costs of lactation feed, restoring body condition in gestation and a reduced number of litters per year and of live born piglets in the next farrowing, the costs of a foster sow are expected to be higher.

An automatic liquid feeding system like the Mambo machine, which provides frequent small but fresh quantities of Baby Wean during a maximum of 10 days, could also be placed in this farrowing pen.

At the same time in a separate trough a dry prestarter is fed ad libitum, which is also used in the machine subsequent to the Baby Wean. Depending on the situation a specific feeding programme can be developed on request. Instead of keeping one farrowing pen occupied by these early weaned piglets, on farms where many litters are weaned simultaneously, it is possible to build a special unit for these early weaned piglets (10-20% of all piglets).

Piglets should be all of the same age, using an all-in, all-out system. This is interesting on very big farms or farms working with a so-called 'multi-week' system. The climate and management of this unit can be specially adapted to the needs of these piglets.

The results obtained at the Denkavit research centre and at commercial farms show that although these early weaned piglets weigh approximately 2.0-2.5kg less at the weaning age of 21-26 days, they reach their slaughter weight at the same time as the other pigs (Fig. 1).

Currently, this system is being applied on an increasing number of farms in many different countries. ■