

# Water: the most important nutrient for newly weaned piglets

It is a fact that water is the most important nutrient for all living beings, which is why water management is so incredibly important in a nursery with newly weaned piglets. At birth, water accounts for as much as 80% of a piglet's body weight and declines to approximately 50% in a market weight pig.

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Many times, it is difficult to make sure newly weaned piglets look for water and take a drink when placed in the nursery. With the stress of leaving the farrowing unit, moving to a nursery facility with new surroundings, as well as being placed in a pen with others, dehydration is one of the greatest challenges facing those piglets.

## How much water does a piglet need?

Growing pigs require about 2.6 litres of water per kilogram of feed intake, but in heat-stress conditions, the ratio can rise to as much as 3.5 times the feed intake.

That is why it is critical for the pig farmer to provide adequate support and ensure those piglets get hydrated so they do not experience any setbacks as they start to grow.



## What kind of support can be given?

First, there needs to be enough available drinker nipples with sufficient flow rates to ensure piglets have access to fresh water and adequate hydration. As a general recommendation, the waterer-to-piglet ratio in a nursery is one waterer for every 10-15 piglets. Here, water flow rate becomes critical to make certain the piglets get enough water, but not so much water flow that a lot is wasted.

The recommended flow rate is about 235-475mL per minute with the ideal flow rate being 350mL per minute to get the correct balance between water intake and water disappearance/wastage.

Second, electrolytes as well as nutrient gels should be given to help keep pigs

hydrated in the first weeks post-weaning. Products that supply chloride, sodium, vitamins, magnesium, and pH acidifiers help keep the gut balanced, which keeps the pigs drinking and eating.

Lastly, the impact of the type of feeder should be considered. Wet/dry feeding is a great way to ensure newly weaned pigs get hydrated and begin eating as soon as they arrive in the nursery.

Placing a nipple in the feeder allows piglets to mix their own gruel feed, which increases both water and feed intake resulting in a healthier gut and better weight gain.

Compared to a box-style dry feeder, a wet/dry feeder improves water and feed intake, resulting in an additional 1.5-3.0kg of weight gain during the nursery phase with over 35% less water disappearance/waste.

## Conclusion

Water is essential for life and plays a critical role in all aspects of a pig's growth, especially that of newly weaned piglets. Therefore, water delivery should be a priority focus for pig farmers – making sure their pigs have enough water without wasting this precious resource. There are many excellent ways to deliver fresh drinking water to pigs. ■

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References are available  
from the author on request

