

# CAREFUL MANAGEMENT REAPS REWARDS

Careful management to ensure the vitality of new-born piglets after farrowing is a very worthwhile investment which reaps rewards, according to Carlos Casanovas, a Spanish vet who specialises in pig breeding units with highly prolific sows.



Image top: Jamie Robertson, LMS  
Below: Danny Skinner, Lazyfold Farm.

**H**is message was that producers should focus on the detail of management around farrowing, ensuring that resources are prepared and available for the first few hours around birth. This might appear expensive, but the rewards would make it very worthwhile.

The project facilitators, Jim Booth of SAOS and Jamie Robertson of LMS, organised a visit by the Spanish vet following a suggestion by one of the members of the community group involved in the monitor farm at Lazyfold in Aberdeenshire.

The group had identified that performance on the farm could be stronger in terms of pre-weaning mortality rates. However, the farm was already operating on a first-class basis in many aspects of production, with the unit achieving 29.5 piglets born alive per sow per year in 2012, from home-bred stock.

“As a unit, we were happy with some aspects of performance and steadily upgrading the farrowing house facilities,” said Danny Skinner of Lazyfold.

“However, with high numbers born we had struggled to achieve the pre-weaning mortality figures that we would have liked.”

#### Focus on pre-weaning survival

Focusing on pre-weaning survival rates was an early target for the monitor farm project, with additional analysis of the routine production data managed by monitor farmers Danny and Alison Skinner.

The age of the sows, time of year, type of farrowing room and reasons for any piglet mortality were all reviewed by the monitor farm group. Most of the data was typical of other high-performing breeding units.

There were small differences between farrowing rooms which appeared to justify the investment in the steady improvement of facilities, but careful consideration also highlighted that the first two to three days after farrowing are critical in managing piglet survival.

The ability to share data is a great strength of the Scottish pig sector.

Carlos said that as number born per litter increases it becomes harder to maintain average birthweights, meaning that the number of low-weight piglets is bound to increase. These light piglets can all make a profit for the business, but they need to survive the first 24–48 hours first.

Stockman Brian Maitland subsequently focused on getting the sows as comfortable as possible before farrowing, and then aimed to visit the farrowing room at least every 30 minutes on farrowing day.

#### Piglet vitality enhanced

A student project was organised to collect further data from the period around farrowing to follow up on the advice given by Carlos. The project focused on ambient air and floor temperatures in each of the 18–20 farrowing pens in each farrowing room on days -1, 0, +1, +2 and +3 around farrowing. The project also investigated the impact of placing shredded recycled paper behind 50% of the sows before farrowing.

The study, carried out by Aberdeen University honours student Elisabeth

## Number of piglets weaned per litter

2003  
9.83

2013  
12.2

Benefit of using shredded paper to reduce losses in farrowing areas.

**Without paper** = 38 piglets lost from a total of 599 (6.3%)

**With paper** = 20 piglets lost from a total of 589 (3.4%)



Dalton, showed clear results which the unit then applied with a positive impact on piglet vitality and survival (see above).

The attention to detail around farrowing, and the small but significant changes implemented by the team at Lazyfold, not only improved performance but improved the profitability as well.

Danny believes that the increase they have seen both in the number of piglets born and number of piglets reared, is due to a number of management improvements they have made at Lazyfold. He reported: ‘A new feeding regime in the farrowing rooms has resulted in the sows being in the right condition at weaning. Getting the feeding right, has really helped boost performance as has the selecting replacement gilts carefully to make genetic improvements to the herd.’

#### Benefits of sharing data

The QMS pig monitor farm project has supported the availability of a single pig management software package to all the QMS quality assured pig units, and this greatly enhances the ability of producers to share and compare data.

Allan Ward, QMS Pig Specialist, had worked closely with the software supplier, Agrosoft, to increase the uptake of the



programme amongst the producers.

“The more progressive producers already had their management software in place and were understandably reluctant to change, and training in the new package was required across Scotland to facilitate the change. There was a lot of effort behind the scenes, but we made encouraging progress,” said Allan.

“The ability to share data is a great strength of the Scottish pig sector, and while data sharing is totally voluntary, the monitor farm project can lead by example. The pre-weaning mortality data is a good example of the value of sharing data, as producers around Europe are all exposed to the same problems as sow prolificacy increases.

“It is a brave decision to open your business to the inspection of your colleagues and to have the raw data from the monitor farm process paraded in public. The return on that exposure needs to be an improvement in profitability, otherwise the whole process will struggle.”

“Working with Danny Skinner and his family is all that we would wish for in the QMS monitor farm programme.”+



Allan Ward, Pig Specialist at QMS.