

How to treat non-milking sows

LANCASTER — When baby pigs are weak, herd managers often conclude they were born that way. But it could be that they aren't getting enough milk.

More often than not they're getting some, but not what they need for proper growth and vigor. When this happens, the real reason could be a lactation problem in the sow.

Sows and gilts that stop milking during the very early stages of lactation cause the swine manager real headaches. About 13 percent of a breeding herd may do this during a farrowing period. Their disease is called MMA (mastitis, metritis,agalactia).

Signs of the disease aren't limited to milk loss or decline, says University of Delaware extension livestock specialist Richard Fowler. Affected animals exhibit loss of appetite, fast breathing, fever, slowness in moving about, low feces output and hard feces. Restlessness in their offspring may indicate hunger.

Discharge from the reproduction tract is not an indication of the disease, since many sows exhibit this without any effect on milk production.

The mammary glands of affected animals are frequently enlarged, firm and hot. These symptoms may involve part or all of a sow's udder.

Normal lactation depends on a sequence of events,

beginning with the production and release of several hormones. Anything that changes the production and release of these hormones will interfere with milk supply.

Environmental stress, poor nutrition and/or bacteria can interrupt milk production.

Stressful situations that can cause milk problems include overfeeding prior to farrowing, penning gilts in a farrowing crate for the first time, high environmental temperature, and use of a new farrowing unit for the first time.

Three days before farrowing, the sow or gilt should be fed a laxative diet aimed at keeping her hungry, says Fowler, though it's hard to find a sow that's not hungry under any circumstances.

The amount of feed given should be limited to about four pounds. With thin sows or in cold weather you may increase the ration by one or two pounds. Feed one tablespoon of epsom salts at the time the sow is put in the farrowing crate.

Maintain a laxative diet by feeding one pound of bran daily along with the regular ration.

Gilts that are placed in farrowing crates for the first time undergo stress, especially if they've been in an outside gestation lot. To settle them in their new environment, pen gilts in the evening and then feed them. Sows and gilts going into new

facilities should have four or five days to adjust before farrowing. Avoid fighting a sow to get her into the crate.

Genetics may play a role in the incidence of MMA, says Fowler. Individuals and lines of pigs that are susceptible to stress seem to have more milking problems. Retain sows that are good mothers and cull those that are nervous and poor-milking. The sow or gilt that gets MMA may or may not get it again. The cause of the disease will have a definite effect on its recurrence.

Early treatment is usually effective. Oxytocin injection is the preferred treatment. Injections can be given every two to four hours. (In cases where the mammary glands become non-functional, these injections will have no effect.)

Hay and straw directory available free

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The latest edition of the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Hay and Straw Directory is now off the press and available free to anyone interested in on-farm sources of hay and straw for livestock, landscaping, gardening and construction uses.

According to MDA marketing specialist Brad Powers who compiled the directory, there is a wide range of farmers with

various types of hay and straw for sale. Price is not listed as this is a matter between buyer and seller.

If you would like a copy visit the nearest Maryland County Extension Service office or send a postcard with your name and complete mailing address to Maryland Department of Agriculture, "Hay & Straw," Parole Plaza Office Building, Annapolis, MD 21401.

In addition, large doses of antibiotic help to reduce the potential for bacterial infections.

Preventing MMA is the key to improving weaning averages. Look for ways to reduce stress. Preventing high noise levels and unnecessary schedule changes may help. Avoid high temperatures around the sow.

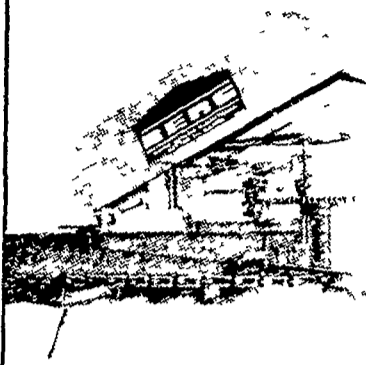
Her comfort zone is 65 to 70 degrees F. Baby pigs require temperatures 20 to 25 degrees higher.

Careful placement of zone heaters for them can keep the sow from getting overheated.

Gestation feeding must be regulated according to sow condition.

Avoid overfeeding or underfeeding. MMA can be controlled through good management.

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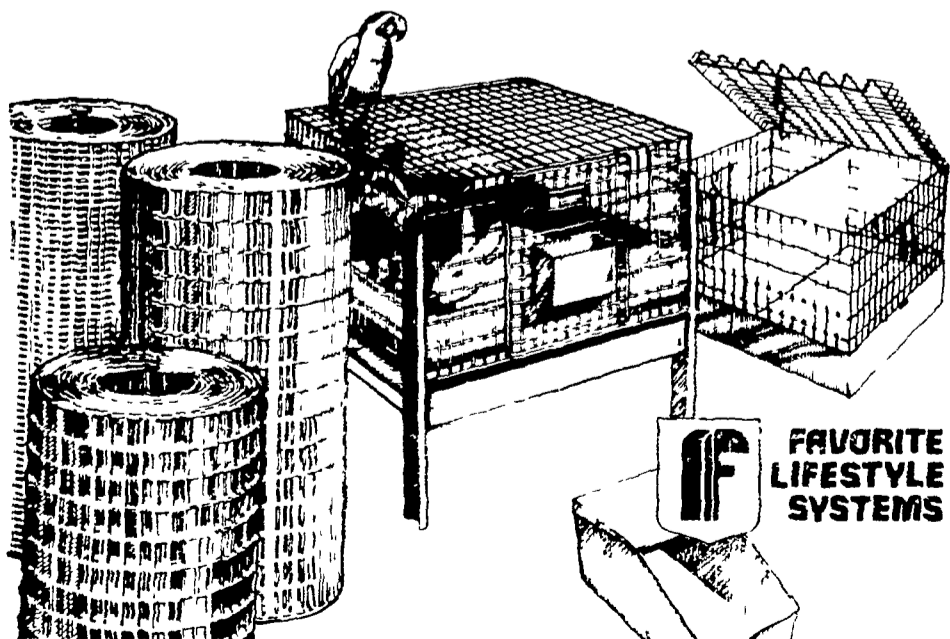
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