

Pay attention to those litter sizes

NEWARK, Del. — Pork producers can increase production profits by increasing their output per litter, says University of Delaware extension livestock specialist Richard Fowler. The cost of producing a 40-pound feeder pig varies with the number of pigs weaned per litter, he says. At 7.5 pigs per sow—about the national average—it costs roughly \$36, or 90 cents a pound to raise a 40-pound pig. Increasing weaned litter size to 9.5 pigs reduces production costs for the same size animal to \$28, or 70 cents a pound.

"Most of these costs are associated with feed," Fowler says. "Every sow in the breeding herd requires 2,000 to 2,200 pounds of feed a year. Production costs can be lowered by increasing the number of pigs weaned per sow per year."

Growers can determine herd weaning averages by dividing the

total number of pigs weaned in a year by the number of farrowings. Then divide the total number of farrowings by the average number of females in the herd. Determine this average from monthly inventories, including gilts from the time they are six months old.

"A weaning average below 8.5 suggests a need for improvement," says the specialist. "Low overhead or outside systems can tolerate lower averages. A confinement producer can't."

Other costs besides feed also go down as herd weaning rate improves. Facilities, labor, interest on capital, fuel, electrical and medical expenses all are lower when spread over more pigs. The specialist estimates overall production costs decline \$2 to \$5 per pig for each additional pig produced per litter.

Farrowing more litters a year from each sow is another way to

reduce production costs per pig. Under good conditions a sow takes 114 days for gestation, 28 days for lactation and six days to return to estrus. This comes to 148 days per litter. Yet most producers allow 215 days. The proportion of gilts in a herd, the number of nonbreeders, and 70 to 80 percent conception rates all add to the length of time required per litter.

"If your goal is to farrow 100 litters a year and you have a litter-per-sow-per-year record of 1.6 (the national average), you need 62 sows to reach your goal," Fowler says. "If your herd averages 2.0 farrowings per female, only 50 sows are needed to produce 100 litters. Twelve fewer sows mean 12 less tons of feed."

Many farms experience lower annual farrowing rates per sow because of high gilt populations, he says. Expose gilts to boars at six months of age when they weigh

240-250 pounds. Pregnancy check 35 days later and sell the open gilts. Cull noncycling females or those that do not return to estrus within eight days of weaning.

Many management practices will improve sow productivity. To increase profits in a breeding herd, the specialist suggests that producers:

*Identify each sow in the herd. Either ear notch or use easy-to-read preprinted tags. Place the tag so no part of it hangs below the edge of the pig's ear.

*Keep records of breeding dates and boars used. When pen mating, rotate boars to a rest pen every 24 hours. Check the ratio of males to females. In groups of sows weaned simultaneously, the ratio should be one to three.

*Shorten lactation periods to four weeks. A five-week lactation is acceptable with a good nursery facility.

*Breed at first heat after weaning. Keep sow groups small (four to six) and continue feeding 5-6 pounds of a 15-16 percent gestation ration.

*Cull nonbreeders or those that fail to exhibit estrus eight days after weaning. Caution: gilts may not cycle promptly after the first farrowing. If a gilt has done a good job, keep her and breed 21 days later.

*Pregnancy test noncycling animals. Two pregnancy testers are available for loan through the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service. Contact county extension offices in Newark, Dover or Georgetown to arrange for their use.

*Breed twice at each heat, using two different boars.

*Keep records.

Growers may also wish to obtain a copy of extension fact sheet No. PIH 45 on reproductive performance, available at county extension offices.

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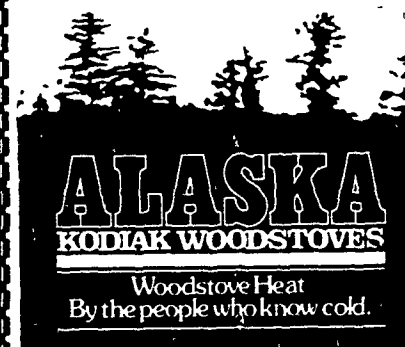


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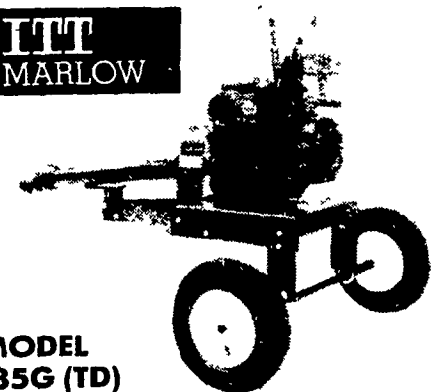
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