

Pig Feeding Management May Cut Reproductive Problems

DES MOINES, Iowa — Strategies to improve feed intake by sows in early weaning systems may help them avoid reproduction problems, according to University of Minnesota research.

"In an effort to become more productive, U.S. pork producers have been using early weaning systems to eliminate some diseases and improve breeding productivity," said University of Minnesota animal scientist Yuzo Koketsu. "But as producers have moved to shorter lactation times for their sows, they're seeing a reduction in reproductive performance."

Koketsu explained that many pork producers now wean piglets when they are 14 to 19 days old. Traditionally, producers wean piglets when they are 21 to 28 days old. In a study of more than 10,000 sows from 16 commercial hog farms, Koketsu found that as producers weaned piglets at a younger age, sows took longer to become pregnant again and pro-

duced smaller litters. The study also showed that when producers managed their pigs to maximize feed intake, the effect of early weaning on reproduction nearly disappeared.

He presented results of the research to more than 1,000 researchers and extension specialists gathered for the joint Midwest meeting of the American Dairy Science Association and the American Society of Animal Science in Des Moines. The research was recognized at the meeting with a National Pork Producers Council Innovation Award for applied research.

"Age of the sow, time of year, genetics, litter size and number of previous litters all have an impact on reproductive performance in early weaning systems," Koketsu noted. "But the results of this study indicate that optimizing feed intake is the most significant management step producers can take to alleviate, at least in part, the negative effects of weaning age on

subsequent farrowing rates."

He explained that sows often reduce feed intake at weaning in response to the reduced demand for energy that milk production requires.

To improve feed and energy intake during and after lactation, Koketsu recommends keeping room temperature at about 66 degrees beginning a week after birth and avoiding overfeeding of pregnant sows. He suggests that fat should be added to feed for lactating sows to increase energy density during hot weather. Also, drip coolers and metal or concrete floors will help keep sows comfortable in warm weather.

Koketsu also notes that to maximize a sow's reproductive performance, piglets should not be weaned until they are at least 14 days old, especially in the spring and summer. "Also, the sow herd should be dominated by stable and mature sows because first-litters sows have a higher risk of having reduced farrowing rates," he said.

Spurge Scourge To Cattle Feed

DES MOINES, Iowa — Researchers at South Dakota State University want to turn range-weed into cow feed.

The researchers are testing silage made from leafy spurge, a noxious weed that costs ranchers millions of dollars each year because it crowds out other range plants and cattle refuse to eat it.

"We thought that making silage out of it might make it more acceptable to the cattle," noted Jill Heemstra, the SDSU graduate research assistant who conducted the study. The researchers theorized that the microbes that cause chopped forage to ferment into silage might also break down the components of spurge that are so repugnant to livestock.

Heemstra found that when enzymes were added to the silage to enhance breakdown of cellulose in the forage, cattle preferred that

silage over any other spurge silage made with other additives. Spurge silage was ignored by the cattle except when mixed with silage made from other plants. When mixed at a rate of 20 percent with oat silage, cattle ate enough of the mix to maintain their body weight.

"We're not sure yet why the cattle had such a strong preference for the silage made with enzymes," Heemstra said. A chemical analysis of spurge is planned to try to identify the compounds that cause cattle to avoid leafy spurge. "Those compounds may be hidden in some fraction of the plant. By enhancing the breakdown of the plant material, we may be releasing those compounds and allowing them to break down," she said.

Although cattle fed the spurge silage suffered from scours, tissue and blood tests and an examination of the digestive tract revealed

no toxins or damage that could be attributed to spurge. That seems to contradict a suspicion that cattle avoid the plant because it irritates their digestive systems, Heemstra said. Scours could be attributed to components in spurge that disrupt the digestive microbes located in a cow's first and largest stomach, the rumen.

"Cattle appear to avoid spurge because of a learned, aversive behavior, not because the plant is toxic," she said.

Heemstra says the results of the research are preliminary, but encouraging. "The research suggests that we could make leafy spurge much more palatable for cattle and eliminate many of problems," she said.

She presented the results of the research at the joint Midwestern meeting of the American Society of Animal Science and the American Dairy Science Association in Des Moines.

Eddy Elected Co-Chair

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Penny Eddy of Smethport has been elected co-chairman of the Pennsylvania Rural Development Council (PRDC), a statewide organization which seeks to expand economic opportunities for the commonwealth's rural residents.

Eddy has served on the Council since 1992 and became a member of the organization's executive committee a year ago. The organization is one of a number of boards, commissions, and other bodies under the jurisdiction of the executive offices of the governor.

"I know that Penny will make a significant contribution to the Rural Development Council and Pennsylvania's 3.7 million rural residents," said Governor Tom Ridge after Eddy's election. "The Rural Development Council provides my Administration with valuable advice and guidance as we seek to develop policies to advance the well being of our rural citizens."


PRDC is a collaborative partnership among private and non-profit sector representatives and local, state, and federal government agencies. Although its principal focus is on economic development, the Council pursues its

work in a holistic fashion, seeking to build communities as well as economic opportunities.

As co-chairman of the Council, Eddy will help guide projects which include increasing value-added processing and manufacturing using Pennsylvania-produced agricultural and forest products, assuring that rural areas have full access to evolving telecommunications and information technology applications, and providing adequate levels of investment capital to rural businesses.

Eddy serves as executive direc-

tor of the McKean County Housing and Redevelopment authorities. She joined the agencies in 1973 and was elevated to the position of executive director in 1980. She also serves on Pennsylvania's Community Development Block Grant Advisory Board, the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Authorities, the executive committee of the McKean County Cooperative Extension Advisory Committee, and numerous other organizations.



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this website includes an abbreviated version of their annual report plus a company news section to keep informed about Dekalb's latest product and research news.

"We continually look for opportunities to make the site more useful by adding product information, links to other important agricultural sites and direct E-mail access to allow farmers to ask questions directly to our agronomists and other employees," said Jim Nesmith, Dekalb's vice president of information technology. "Our major objective is to provide more information regarding our products. Dekalb offers some of the most technologically advanced seed and swine genetics products in the industry, so it's appropriate to inform customers and prospects via a technology-based medium like the Internet."

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