

Sweden Pig Farrowing Crates Discussion

Tuesday 16 February 2021

2000 - 2132

Date:	Tuesday 16 February 2021
Time:	8:00pm – 9:32pm
Location	Teams

Members:	NAWAC Subcommittee (Chair included)
Attendees:	MPI Representatives
Invited Speakers:	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences Representatives

Meeting Summary:

On Tuesday 16 February 2021, the NAWAC pig subcommittee met online with scientists and pig experts from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. The scientists ran through several presentations, and discussions were had regarding Swedish legislation, the Swedish pig industry, alternative farrowing systems, and the transition to these.

Sweden banned the prolonged use of farrowing crates in 1988 however confinement was accepted for a shorter period <1 week until a full ban came into force in 1994. Regulation states that straw or other material must be provided daily. Tail docking was banned in 1988, and castration must only be performed with the use of pain relief and local anaesthetics. The use of temporary crating is only permissible if the sow is particularly aggressive towards her piglets, the piglets welfare is at a high risk, or for the purposes of handling and treatment applications.

A particular point was made that large-scale commercial piggeries were able to see good production results, even when sows are fully loose housed. This was largely attributed to good management practices, well designed pens, pens with a spatial footprint larger than 6m², and good stockmanship/husbandry skills. A notable difference has been the piglets are very large and robust at weaning, with good growth rates, very low post weaning mortality rates, and very minimal use of antibiotics post weaning. Providing piglet feed several times a day helps to minimise the metabolic and physical strain on the sow.

The legal requirements for a farrowing pen are as follows:

- Total pen area of a minimum 6m²
- Within the farrowing area, at least part must be solid flooring, it is not permissible to have a fully slatted farrowing area.

- Lying area was originally 4m², this has now changed to ¾ of the lying area should be solid and ¼ can be slatted. Most are now are 3m² solid flooring.
- Piglets need a space where the sow cannot reach them

Some important design features are as follows:

- Piglet area should be easily accessible from walkway
- The slurry system should be one that can handle straw – farmers tend to use an underfloor scrape type system
- Protection rails are important
- Straw should be plentiful around the time of farrowing
- The piglet area should be in a position where the sow would naturally farrow into
- Clear roofing material should be placed over the piglet area – this keeps in warmth, and allows the staff to view piglets with minimal disturbance
- Farrowing rooms should have fewer sows rather than more, as the added noise of more sows can cause unnecessary stress to other sows
- A long feeding trough allows for the piglets to learn eating behaviours
- During critical 2 days post farrow, if not enough straw is used on a solid floor, the piglets can cause damage to their soft feet leading to lameness issues
- Nesting behaviour is a vital behaviour for the sows to perform in order for good maternal behaviours to follow during the lactation period

An intervention study of four farms was carried out to determine whether temporarily crating sows for the duration of farrowing and the crucial period 2-3 days post farrowing would decrease piglet mortality as opposed to a free farrowing system. In the study where sows were crated for 5 days, results stated no significant improvement in piglet mortality or survival.

Furthermore, in another study in a commercial farm sows were crated for 3 days after farrowing. No consistent positive effect of crating was found in the study. For crushing, during 1–3 days after birth, an interaction between sow age and farrowing system was observed, with differences between farrowing systems only for intermediate-aged and older sows (>parity 2). Furthermore, about seven times more farrowing problems was recorded in sows that were crated after farrowing compared to the loose housed sows.

Sows are group housed before mating. For the process of artificial insemination individual sows can be crated temporarily when the insemination procedure is performed. However, after the procedure, they must be released back into the group. There are several types of insemination areas that farmers use, crates are most common, some use insemination boxes which hold 2-3 sows, and some AI in deep litter/bedding areas where the insemination procedure can be performed *in situ*.