

NZ Pig Veterinarian's Position on Farrowing Crates and Mating Stalls

Thursday 15 April

1800 - 1851

Date:	Thursday 15 th April
Time:	6:00pm – 6:51pm
Location:	Teams Meeting
Attendees	
Subcommittee members:	NAWAC Pig Subcommittee (Chair Included)
MPI Secretariat:	MPI Representatives
Invited Speakers:	NZ Pig Veterinarian Representatives
Apologies:	NZ Pig Veterinarian Representative

Meeting Summary:

On Thursday 15 April the NAWAC Pig Subcommittee met with representatives for New Zealand Pig Veterinarians to hear their position on farrowing crates and mating stalls.

The New Zealand Pig Veterinarians are in a unique position in that they consult to a wide range of farrowing and mating systems, work around 40% of their time physically with pigs, and the animal's welfare must be accounted for in their work.

The position of the NZ Pig Veterinarian's is as follows:

Farrowing Crates

- Farrowing crates are not favoured by farmers due to the increased costs, and cleaning and maintenance requirements, however they provide a system which decreases piglet mortality while allowing safe sow management. Should a system be proposed which optimises both piglet and sow welfare while keeping staff safe, it will be adopted by the industry. Of the options currently being considered by NAWAC, Combi-pens achieve the best balance between the piglet and sow welfare needs while allowing for the legal provisions around health and safety.
- Concerns were expressed around open pens becoming a minimum standard as there are some significant limitations that impact on animal welfare, these can include (but are not limited to) colostrum management, dystocia assistance, suckling assistance, and fostering). Piglet mortality rates are higher in pens than that in temporarily confined systems.
- Research studies are generally conducted under well-resourced conditions and many of them compare piglet mortality rates with figures from confined sows that are not reflective of the potential that confinement systems are capable of (i.e. pen systems make it very difficult for an operator who applies effort to colostrum and piglet management to drive mortality to 10%

or lower mortality as can be achievable with confined or temporarily confined systems.) . As NZ Veterinarians have seen, commercially practiced pen farrowing systems achieve different statistics to those provided in some research papers with significant blow outs in mortality numbers being observed in the field. If consistent performance was observed, they would be widely implemented.

- No significant aversion to entering farrowing crates has been observed in second parity (+) sows. As a rule, pigs will show aversion to something they have had a previous negative experience with. First parity gilts can show a stress response initially and require a settlement period to habituate to the environment. A pre farrow confinement allowance of two days before expected farrowing date would be manageable and would allow the majority of litters to be born with the advantages of sow confinement (e.g. separation of manure, ability to assist sows and piglets, provision of manipulable material etc).
- Farrowing dates can be estimated based on mating date, which is almost always known in advance, however normal biological variation in gestation length will mean that a minority of sows will farrow earlier or later than is planned for. Induction of farrowing will reduce variation in gestation length but not all farms are eligible for this due to various reasons.
- Should free farrowing become a minimum standard with solid floors, straw bedding, scraper drains etc, the cost of constructing new purpose-built buildings will be prohibitive. In addition, the high piglet mortality will contribute to it being uneconomic. Most indoor farmers will exit the industry leaving non-compliant imported pork to fill the void and cause an overall net animal welfare decrease, which will be contrary to this process.

Mating Stalls

- Artificial insemination (AI) reduces locomotory injuries that are caused by the boar and by being ridden by other sows if they are grouped when all are in oestrus at the same time – the percentage of these injuries is low however the impact is significant.
- Sows must be calm during AI. Adrenaline overrides oxytocin which can decrease the likelihood of a successful insemination. Moving sows in and out of mating stalls can cause some degree of stress to the sow.
- Voluntary mating stalls reduce stressors.