



H10 – Nurse sow for underweight piglets

Be sure the smallest piglets could get enough of colostrum and milk. You can move the smallest piglets to nurse sow for underweight piglets, but you must ensure that the piglets get colostrum.

An optimum nurse sow for underweight piglets:

1. **is either** a sow that is just finishing farrowing (the nursing piglets can be placed with her immediately after birth).
2. **or is** a sow that has farrowed min. 12 hours ago (if the piglets could receive colostrum from their own mother).
3. has small teats that present well to the piglets. It could be a gilt or a second parity sow.
4. is sow what is calm.
5. situated in a pen with an optimum environment for small piglets.
6. if necessary, put the heat lamp in the pen and place a thick layer of bedding in the heating corner.
7. **It is essential that the nurse sow's own piglets get colostrum before they are moved or from the receiving sow!**



The nurse sow has accepted small piglets.

Incorrect handling of small piglets

- Do not place the smallest piglets in a large litter a day after they are born. This increases the risk of them dying.
- The smallest piglets are so weak that they cannot get to the udder and die.



All piglets can't get to the udder.



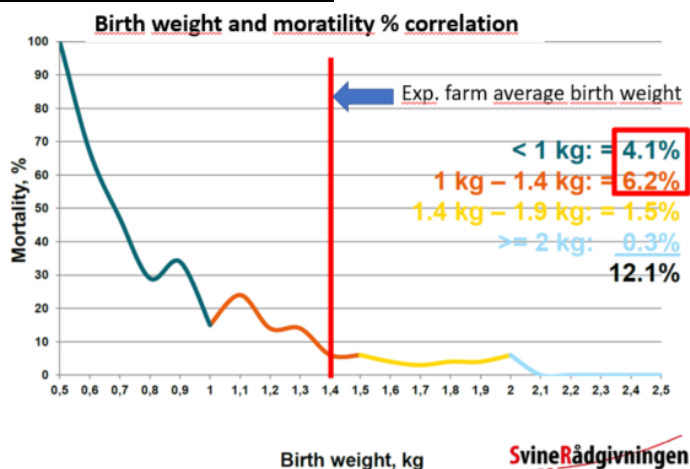
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Extra comments - Nurse sow for underweight piglets

Before you move very small piglets, assess are the piglets enough vitality to become moved.

1. You can ensure the piglets get colostrum by not moving them before they are min. 12 hours old. Another option is to do split suckling with their own mother, until the smallest piglets will move to nurse sow. Alternatively, can serve colostrum for the piglets. The piglets will be able to manage when they have received 3 x 30 ml milk (See H5 – Supervision of farrowing and H7 - Colostrum). It is an advantage to supply colostrum with one-hour intervals.
2. You can also ensure colostrum for all piglets by placing the smallest piglets with a sow what is farrowing. Move the pig piglets to other sows what are also farrowing, so that way they also get colostrum (See H7 -Colostrum).
3. A nurse sow for underweight piglets must have teats that the smallest piglets can reach and get into their mouths.
4. A nurse sow must be calm, that the small piglets can get to the udder. Often a first parity sow is less calm than a second parity sow and that's why needs more stimulation to start lactating. If you use a first parity sow as a nurse sow, give her the biggest piglets.
5. The climate in the pen must be optimum, that the piglets can stay warm. The pen must be warm, dry and airflow - free (see H13 - The environment of the piglets).
6. You can improve the environment of the smallest piglets by using the heat lamp and perhaps install an extra heat lamp outside the piglet's nest. Bedding is an excellent method for increasing the temperature. Woodchips are not suitable as they may scratch and thereby increase the risk of umbilical infections and umbilical hernia. You can also add an extra drinking trough for water, electrolyte or other energy sources (See H23 - Feeding of piglets). However, do not supply electrolytes after 1.5 days, because it could shut the intestines too soon and then the piglets will not be able to absorb antibodies from the colostrum.
7. If the nursing piglets are moved to a sow what is farrowing, the sow's own piglets must get colostrum from the sow where they are moved to. This sow must have finished farrowing max. 12 hours earlier.



The figure shows the correlation between birth weight and the risk of a dying piglet. The piglets what are less than 1 kg at birth become step by step a higher risk to die. Herds average birth weight and how big is variation of birth weight has big influence of results.

Content of antibodies (mg per ml milk) in colostrum (Klobosa & Butler (1987))

Sows milk antibodies level drop quite fast after farrowing

Hours after farrowing	IgG	IgM	IgA
0	96	9	21
12	32	4	10
24	14	3	6
72	4	2	6



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