



## H8 – Cross-fostering

**Cross-fostering focus is to get the sow manage so many piglets as possible**

1. The piglets must have colostrum for min. 12 hours before moving
2. Cross-foster to 12-15 piglets/litter depending on the number of functional teats. Use at first just ready farrowed sows, what have more functional teats than piglets
3. Make nurse sows for the excess piglets.
4. If possible, move smallest piglets with second parity sows
5. Cross-fostering must be done max. 36 hours after farrowing.
6. Primarily move big / strong piglets.
7. Move so few piglets as possible between litters, but move before they stop growing.
8. Do not move piglets between litters more than 2 days after farrowing. If need, move older than 2 days piglets to a foster sow



Every piglet must have access to functional teat

### Unsuccessful cross-fostering:

- the sow can only nurse same amount of piglets, what it has functional teats
- the smallest / last-born piglets lose the struggle for milk

### If you cross-foster too early:

- the piglets may not have received colostrum and may die from lack of antibodies

### If you cross-foster too late:

- too late transferred piglets will disrupt the teat order on the litters
- free tits don't give any more milk, if have going too long time from farrowing



This sow has more piglets than she can manage, also piglet nest is open



Euroopan maaseudun  
kehittämisen maatalousrahasto:  
Eurooppa investoi maaseutualueisiin



### Extra comment - cross-fostering

1. It is crucial that all the piglets have get colostrum before cross-fostering. The smallest piglets may need up to 12 hours before they have had a sufficient colostrum intake. If a small piglet moved to a sow that is still farrowing or has just finished farrowing, the piglet will get colostrum from there.  
If litter have too many piglets, do after 12 hours cross-fostering and move the biggest / strongest piglets to a nurse sow, that how you also guarantee sufficient colostrum to the smallest piglets. On large litter also possible to move to nursing sow first birth piglets when they have been 12 hours under sow, on that case you must know what piglets have come first!  
If the sow has not finished farrowing or you can't start yet to do cross-fostering, isolate the biggest / first-born piglets in the piglet nest (corner) for a while and leave the smallest suckling the udder.
2. How to handle excess piglets between optimal ability of suckling amount:
  - use at first just ready farrowed sows, what have more functional teats than piglets
  - if a sow has farrowed within the last 2 days and one of her piglet die, you can move a piglet to this sow. This piglet must be bigger than the other piglets in the litter.
    - if you move a piglet to a litter in where have one or more piglets died, it is important to check that the sow is not sick or it haven't more piglets than functional teats.
  - Assess the body condition and last lactation time of the sow, how it will manage.
  - Old sows (5th parity, or more) should not give more piglets than she has suckled last time.
3. The second priority for handling of excess piglets is make a nursing sow. (look H9 – Nurse sows).
4. 2nd and 3rd parity sows are best at accepting new smallest piglets. Do not use first parity sows to nurse the smallest piglets, gilts need the biggest piglets to stimulate udder to start better milk product.
5. Be sure that all piglets get a functioning teat, cross-fostering must be done max. 36 hours after farrowing. If you do cross-foster later than this, it is risk that free teats not give any milk.
6. It could take many hours (3-6 hours) before piglets get milk from the new sow. That's why the moved piglets must be enough strong. It is also important, that the moved piglets should be about same size as the rest of that litter where moving piglet are coming.
7. **Main rule:** piglets manage best with their own mother, that's why you should move as few piglets as possible. Keep an eye on the weak piglets:
  - small piglets
  - agitated piglets
  - piglets what lying passively on heating corner or outside that area
8. See H12 - Foster sow for piglets with reduced growth.

