

H5 - Supervision of farrowing



Newborn piglet found in due time

In due time, take care of sows and piglets that encounter problems.

1. Check for milk in the udder, swollen labia and mucus from the vagina as indications of impending farrowing.
2. Inspect the sow every hour during farrowing as a minimum.
3. Note the number of piglets born at the time of inspection.
4. There should be max. 2 hours between the first 4 piglets and max. 1 hour between the next piglets. Perform obstetric aid if all piglets in the litter are dry and the sow seems to be expecting more piglets.
5. Help small or weak piglets get to the udder and ensure they start taking in colostrum. If necessary, place them under the heat lamp to warm them.
6. Assess whether the farrowing process is complete. If in doubt, examine the birth canal.
7. Examine the health of the sow. Feel for hard mammary glands and observe her behaviour.



Failure to detect a bad farrowing course


For the sow, inadequate supervision during farrowing means that

- A poor farrowing course is not recognized.
- The sow is weakened and will have difficulty starting the subsequent lactation.

For the piglets, inadequate supervision during farrowing means that

- Increasingly more piglets die from lack of oxygen.
- Weak piglets die as they get no colostrum and are cold.

Additional comments - Supervision of farrowing

1. One to two days prior to farrowing, the sow's vagina swells and becomes red. It is also possible to milk clear liquid from the teats. When farrowing is approx. 12 hours away, you can milk colostrum from the teats, and you will see clear mucus in the vagina.
2. If no piglets have been born within the last hour, assess whether the litter is smaller than expected. If, at the same time, you can see only few placentas or the sow is restless, perform obstetric aid (see H6 - Obstetric aid). Obstetric aid stresses the sow, and contractions will often be weak for the following hour, which delays farrowing. Therefore, only perform obstetric aid when you suspect there is a problem.
3. On the sow card, write the number of piglets at the time of inspection. At the next inspection, you can see if more piglets have been born. If necessary, note the time for each inspection. Use, for instance, an F disc.
The image shows a circular 'Farrowing Clock' titled 'F~Skiven'. It has an outer ring labeled 'KLOKKEN' with numbers 1-12. Inside are concentric rings: a red innermost ring labeled 'DØDEFODTE', a green middle ring labeled 'LEVENDEFODTE', and a blue outer ring. A white hand points to the 10 o'clock position.
4. There must be no more than two hours between the first 4 piglets, and max. 1 hour between the next. If you only see dry piglets at your inspection, the sow has not delivered piglets for the last hour. A normal farrowing course lasts approx. 4-5 hours. This means that when litter size is low, a long time passes between the piglets, while at a high litter size, little time passes between the piglets. Generally, 20 minutes pass between the piglets, but there may be pauses of up to an hour. Pauses that long are often caused by the farrowing having stopped, and obstetric aid should be performed as the risk of stillborn piglets will otherwise increase. If you generally observe many stillborn piglets, night supervision is recommended. If farrowing stops, exercise the sow in the inspection alley.
5. It is difficult for small and weak piglets to get to the udder. They must be assured of colostrum. If necessary, warm them under the heat lamp or in an incubator. Cold and hunger destroys the intestinal surface of newborn piglets. Colostrum is ensured by expressing colostrum into the mouth of the piglet or by having a colostrum bank (see below).
6. When the sow is no longer delivering piglets, assess whether farrowing is complete or whether there may still be foetuses inside the sow. If the sow is calm and tends to the piglets, is eating again and there are many foetal membranes behind her (one per piglet), the sow has finished. If in doubt, provide obstetric aid (see H6 - Obstetric aid).
7. Farrowing is hard on the sow. If the sow is sick after farrowing, she must be treated to ensure that she and her piglets will survive (see H15 - Disease and treatment of sows).

Expressing colostrum for weak piglets:

- You can express the milk into the mouth of the piglet.
- You can express the milk into a cup. Pick a calm sow that is farrowing or has just farrowed. Use your hand as you would when milking a cow by hand.