



TRAINING AND SUPERVISION OF GROUP HOUSED SOWS BY THE STOCKPERSON

Confined sows are easier to manage than those housed in groups.

Greater stockmanship skill is required for successful group housing.

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP

Pigs are curious, easily trained and have good memories. Not only can they recognise other pigs for at least 6 weeks but they also remember poor handling by humans and become more difficult to handle. This is often accompanied by increased stress and poorer production.

Highly fearful pigs are the most **difficult to handle**. This can cause stockpersons' attitudes and behaviour to deteriorate which in turn increases the pigs' fear of humans, leading to a vicious circle.

!!! NOTE: Sows should receive mainly positive handling from stockpersons

MONITORING AND SUPERVISION BY THE STOCKPERSON

Regular observation of sow behaviour and condition especially at feeding time, is essential to detect and solve any welfare problems. The stockperson should enter the pens at least once a day to examine and contact the pigs. **Varying body condition, aggression, skin lesions, lameness and vulva biting all indicate reduced welfare.**

SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON ELECTRONIC SOW FEEDERS (EFS):

✓The stockperson should screen and study the computer-generated information every day to detect animals that are not feeding and/or any other problem with the electronic device.

✓Feeding ration can be adjusted for individual pigs according to body condition and the intake rate.

✓Daily action lists generated by the computer indicate sows which have not had their allocated ration. Reasons for not eating should be investigated. For example, problem sows may have lost their electronic identification tag and thereby fail to access the feeder. This should be rectified immediately.

✓Particular sows can be marked and separated from the group when required for farrowing or for treatment.



Lame animals should be detected and treated as soon as possible

!!! NOTE: When selecting an electronic system it is recommended to opt for a known manufacturer that can provide 24 hour support service. Electronic sow feeding should only be selected when the motivation for its adoption is high. Although the system is highly automated it cannot take care of pigs by itself and results can be disastrous if the technical opportunities are not exploited to their full extent

TRAINING GILTS TO USE SPECIFIC FEEDING DESIGNS:ESFs

Poor or inadequate training can result in many missed meals and eventually require the removal of these sows from the system. Training is not particularly difficult when a well-designed training pen and protocol are used, but it is time consuming and requires specific arrangements.

GILTS FACE THREE NOVEL FEATURES:

- 1 – The feeding system
- 2 – The housing
- 3 – The presence of other sows

SOME TIPS ON THE TRAINING OF GILTS:

- ✓Such training should be done at least two weeks before insemination.
- ✓Gilts can be trained in a week by housing them in small groups and ensuring that each animal passes through the station each day.
- ✓Their ration can be reduced the day before training to facilitate learning.
- ✓Gilts should enter the feeding station by themselves, which can be encouraged by placing some feed on the floor. If necessary, gilts can be guided towards the entrance. If this fails the gilts should be forced to enter the feeding station.



Gilts using a training feeding station

!!! NOTE: Gilts must be trained to use an electronic feeder with other gilts before being housed with mature sows

✓Once trained in a small group, the animals should ideally be incorporated into a moderately sized group before eventually joining a larger one. Introducing just 1 or 2 animals into a large group should be avoided due to the likelihood of intense aggression targeted at the newcomers. **The longer the training period, the fewer missed feeds will occur.**

✓Besides getting used to the feeding system, gilts should have enough time and space to develop social skills. Gilts can find it difficult to compete at the feed station and they generally take longer to eat their feed than sows. Ideally, they should be housed in a separate group until their second pregnancy. This may require a separate feed station.

!!! NOTE: After weaning/service, some sows may require a few days of less intensive retraining to use the ESF before they are re-introduced into the main group. Some sows may be very difficult to train, especially older sows after conversion from individual to group housing

MAIN REASONS FOR CULLING

- ✓**Management decisions** to cull when the sow reaches a specific parity and/or when she fails to conceive or shows poor performance.
- ✓The incidence of **lameness**. Lameness not only reduces welfare but also has a significant financial cost. Using non-slippery floors and reducing the level of aggressions can reduce lameness.
- ✓**Failure to adapt to group feeding**. In all group housing systems, a certain percentage of animals (around 1%) may fail to adapt to group feeding. These animals should be culled or kept as a separate group for special attention.

!!! NOTE: In small static groups sows' pregnancy cycles may become desynchronised making the system difficult / inefficient to manage. This may lead to culling if the animals cannot be moved to another group, which in itself may not be simple. For example, adding 1 animal to a group of 4 can result in intense aggression directed towards the new animal

