

# Pig Owner's News for the

# Hunter



## Breeding – Pregnancy and Farrowing

July 2021

### Pregnancy

Sows are pregnant for three months, three weeks and three days. That is 115 days, with a range of 111 to 120 days, from the first day of mating. Piglets born before 109 days are classed as abortions. Any piglets born between 109 and 112 days are classed as a premature farrowing. Pregnancy length can vary due to age, environmental conditions, breed, or time of the year. Gilts and sows carrying larger litters tend to have shorter pregnancy length.

During pregnancy it is important to keep the sow in familiar surroundings and in her normal routine. Feed her an appropriate feed that is high in nutrients. She can remain in her existing group right through to farrowing, but other pigs may show increased interest in her and increase the chances of her piglets being squashed.

A week or two before her due date separate the sow and give her clean housing. Short straw is appropriate bedding for newborn piglets. Two to four weeks before farrowing is also the ideal time to worm the sow for any parasites and vaccinate her, so that the antibodies are transferred in the milk to the piglets.



### Farrowing

There are several different signs that indicate that farrowing is imminent and the exact timing and signs vary greatly from sow to sow and even between different litters from the same sow. Farrowing is a natural process and the sow will usually need no help.

Two weeks prior the teats will begin to enlarge and the veins in the udder will become more prominent. The vulva will begin to swell and may redden around four days before farrowing. Approximately two days before farrowing, the mammary glands become taut, triangular and more defined and watery secretions may be seen from the teats. This secretion will become more 'milky'

within 12-24 hours. If there is abundant milk in the teats and it flows easily when you gently squeeze the teats, the sow will probably farrow within the next six hours. The sow becomes restless and starts to make a nest within twenty four hours of giving birth. Their respiration rate may also increase, usually peaking around ten hours before farrowing.

About an hour before giving birth the sow may lie quietly on her side in her nest before the straining begins. Some sows may become agitated and restless as their uterine contractions intensify. Blood stained fluid may pass from the vagina one to two hours before the birth begins.

Intermittent abdominal muscle straining occurs before the birth of the first piglet, usually accompanied by shivering, with the sow drawing her hind leg upwards. After the first piglet is born, the straining usually becomes milder, except just before each piglet is born. There can be a forty five minute delay between the first and second piglet but from then on 10-20 minutes between live piglets is normal, but this can range from a couple of minutes to a couple of hours.

Most piglets are born head first with the front legs folded back (anterior presentation) but they may present backwards with the rear legs first (posterior presentation). The twitching of the sow's tail is a good sign that another piglet is due to arrive in the next 10 seconds. The whole birthing process usually takes between three and six hours (can be less than an hour to ten hours).

Newborn piglets are still attached to their umbilical cord and it breaks (you do not need to cut it) as they struggle and try to walk. The piglet will immediately search for a teat and milk. It is normal for sows to remain inactive for most of the first 24-48 hours. The placenta/after-birth is usually passed within four hours after the last piglet is delivered, but this can take up to twelve hours. The failure to pass the afterbirth often indicates that there is another piglet or piglets in the birth canal. Some sows will eat their afterbirth and any dead piglets.

It is normal for the sow to have a discharge from her vulva which may be slight to heavy at times, for five days post farrowing.

Sows will have on average 10 piglets in each litter and may have two litters each year.

<b>Signs of Imminent Farrowing</b>	<b>Time Before Farrowing</b>
Teat enlargement/development	10 days - 14 days
Swelling/reddening of vulva	4 days - 6 days
Mammary glands become taut and triangular, may have watery secretions	2 days - 4 days
Milky secretions	6 hours - 1 day
Nest building/increased respiration	0.5 days - 1 day
Lull in sow activity	1 hour - 2 hours
Small amounts of blood-tinged fluid	15 minutes - 30 minutes
Abdominal muscle straining and shivering	Minutes
Tail wagging	Seconds

## Aftercare

Once farrowing is complete, the sow will stand, urinate and lie down to allow the piglets to suckle. The piglets should fall asleep at the teat.

Sows may not be interested in their food after giving birth for a short while, but their appetite should return within 24 hours. Keep a close eye on the sow for the first few days. If she continues to be off her food and lethargic, you may need to call your vet.

During the birthing process and the following 24-48 hours is when the sow is most likely to squash her piglets. When the sow stands up, the piglets gather around her legs and can easily get trapped when she lies down again. The less overweight the sow is, the quicker she can get up when they squeal from underneath her. The use of a farrowing rail or pen can help minimise squished piglets, especially if you hang a heat lamp over the piglet area, as they will be out of the sow's reach.



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