

Pig Owner's News for the

Hunter



Breeding – Farrowing Difficulties

August 2021

Farrowing is one of the most exciting times on the farm and there is nothing quite like watching your sow deliver a litter of healthy, squirming piglets. The majority of sows farrow unassisted. However, it is important to recognise when the sow may be in difficulty and require assistance. Thankfully this isn't very often and only in less than 1% of all farrowings. To be able to know when intervention is needed, you must first be familiar with the normal farrowing process. See last month's newsletter about the normal farrowing process. Try not to over-react or interfere unnecessarily with a normal farrowing. However, delays in providing assistance or calling your private veterinarian can be detrimental to the health and survival of your sow and her piglets.

Signs of a difficult farrowing:

- Gestation greater than 116 days (greater than 120 days in gilts)
- Not eating
- Blood tinged fluid and meconium discharged with no straining
- Straining without delivery of piglets
- More than one hour between the birth of piglets, and the sow still has a full abdomen
- Foul smelling brown/grey discharge
- Reddening of the sow's eyes
- Exhaustion after prolonged labour, weakness or inability to rise
- Sow distress, rapid breathing or panting



Farrowing Problems:

- Uterine inertia (uterus is unable to contract)
- Malpresentation of piglet (breech, upside down, two piglets simultaneously)
- Canal obstruction (hymen constriction in gilt, vaginal or cervical prolapse, constipation, full bladder)
- Deviation of uterus (rotation, partial uterine torsion, s-shaped deviation)
- Very large piglets and a small pelvis (or an over fat sow)
- Sow hysteria – nervousness of the sow, excitement or distress
- Illness of the sow, such as acute mastitis
- Dead or mummified pigs inside the uterus
- Retained placenta/blood or pus discharge
- Vaginal, uterine or bladder prolapse
- Haemorrhage

If the sow is having contractions without any piglets appearing, check the birth canal. You must have a well-lubricated (KY jelly/obstetrical lubricant), gloved hand and short nails. Clean the sow's external genitalia (vaginal and rectal area) using clean, warm water with a mild antiseptic. Do not use detergents or try and force your dry arm into the vagina of a sow without lubricants. After washing your hands and arm well (use elbow length gloves if possible), hold your hand in a cone shape and gently enter through the lips of the vulva, into the birth canal. Examine the sow while she is lying on her side. Feel for improperly presented (tail first or broadside) or extremely large piglets. Be very careful not to cause damage to the sow. Keep examinations of the sow's reproductive tract to a minimum. Tearing or bruising the tissues of the birth canal, can lead to swelling, infection, haemorrhage or death, both of the sow and the piglets. Keeping sows cool during farrowing may help prevent exhaustion. You should consult with your private veterinarian before intervening or assisting.

If the sow is experiencing uterine inertia, where she has stopped contracting, you may be able to feel piglets waiting just beyond the cervix. Gently you may be able to place your first and second fingers around their neck. If they are in the breech position or backwards, gently place your first and second fingers around their hocks. If there is a piglet that is too big, and it doesn't move with gentle manipulation, you should call your private veterinarian. Similarly, the veterinarian may be able to assist with uterine inertia by giving the sow some oxytocin if required.



If you are unable to feel any piglets but suspect there are still more in the uterus or the sow is still straining, contact your private veterinarian, as there may be rotation of the uterine horns. Similarly, if the sow is hysterical or panicking, a veterinarian may be required to give her some sedation.

Piglets that appear dead at birth (stillborn) may be able to be helped. First, clear the mouth and nostrils of the pig with your fingers or a clean cloth. You can also take a small piece of straw and poke it gently into the nostril. This will often elicit a coughing reflex that will remove any mucous that is blocking the windpipe. To clear fluids from, and force air into the lungs, hold the piglet by its rear legs and gently but forcefully sling them in a downward arc. Another method is to grasp the rear

legs and pump them toward the abdomen while holding the pig's head downward. A vigorous rubbing or massaging action may be the stimulus needed to get the pig breathing on its own.

Assistance at farrowing also prevents some losses of pigs trapped in the placenta, although most pigs alive at birth will escape the afterbirth surrounding them.

Loss of one or more piglets during farrowing is unfortunate, but loss of the sow is serious and places the survival of all her piglets in doubt. Sows may die during farrowing due to internal bleeding from haemorrhaging blood vessels in the uterus. An anaemic appearance (pale skin, gums and eyelids) may be indicative of internal haemorrhages. However, excessive bleeding may not be apparent before death of the sow. If your sow begins to haemorrhage after farrowing, call your private veterinarian immediately.

You can help prevent sow mortality due to excessive heat by ensuring that she is farrowing somewhere that is cool and well ventilated. Cool water can be swabbed along the jowl and udder of the sow, but never pour water on the head of an over-heated sow. A portable fan can also be used.

Failure of the sow to expel the placenta may result in infection, rebreeding problems and possibly death of the sow. Some placenta is passed during delivery of the piglets, but most will pass immediately after farrowing or within several hours. Reduced appetite or elevated rectal temperatures may be the first clue of a retained placenta. Always monitor your sow closely for 24 hours after farrowing to ensure infection is not developing in the uterus or udder, that the placenta was expelled entirely and that the piglets are all suckling normally.

If you have had to assist in delivering the piglets or there have been stillborn piglets, it is important to contact your private veterinarian so that the sow can be checked over, as antibiotics may be required in some cases.



If your sow has had a difficult farrowing, it is important that there is a safe environment for the piglets. Sows who have had difficulty farrowing are often exhausted and more likely to roll on their piglets and crush them. Any piglets that survived a difficult farrowing must be observed to ensure they are feeding from the sow.

© State of New South Wales through Local Land Services 2019. The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing August 2021. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of Local Land Services or the user's independent adviser. For updates go to www.lls.nsw.gov.au

