



After a very, very, very long January, we are pleased to present to you our February Newsletter!

The Garth Pig Health Scheme



Last year within our practice we started The Garth Pig Health Scheme. This is the health monitoring program based on abattoir inspections. Currently, we conduct inspections in 4 abattoirs: Malton, Colne, Preston and Spalding, with plans to expand checks to other abattoirs. Regular abattoir checks have allowed us to collect a lot of useful data that can contribute to improving the health and welfare of the animals, thus carcass quality.

The following pathological findings are recorded: EP-like lesions, viral pneumonia distribution, pleuropneumonia, lung abscesses, pyaemia, pleurisy, milk spot, tail bites, carcass abscess, skin papular dermatitis, pericarditis, peritonitis. Many of these conditions have been associated with a reduction in performance traits and consequent increases in production costs, with respiratory related issues being the main group of findings among them. However, non-respiratory diseases also contribute to considerable economic losses at farm level, as well as welfare problems.

Recently we have seen an increase in papular dermatitis cases in assessed pigs. Skin lesions are a common significant welfare issue which can negatively impact production. The average level of this finding in our reports is 3.4% with some farms at levels well above 20%. Skin lesions can cause losses related to the death of the affected pigs, treatment costs, growth retardation and carcass condemnations in the slaughterhouses. There is no recent data available but a few years ago it was estimated that the loss to the British pig industry from carcass condemnation due to skin lesions was £3.5 million per

year (that figure includes both vice-related skin lesions and papular dermatitis).

A number of agents can cause papular dermatitis including sarcoptic mange mite, harvest mite larvae and urine scald but a very common cause is hypersensitivity to the insect bites. Biting flies commonly affect pigs, resulting in rubbing, scratching, bleeding and excoriations, as well as raised wheals and oedema associated with urticaria. Skin lesions are also an open gate for the secondary bacterial infections.

Most skin conditions can be controlled by good hygiene, sanitation and biosecurity. Housing should be kept clean, dry and regularly disinfected. Hygiene, insect and rodent control, and restricted movement of personnel and equipment between animals of different age groups should be applied as much as possible in pig herds. Monitoring the prevalence of papular dermatitis changes during the health checks at the abattoir can also help control it and prompt reaction if the problem emerges.

Please contact the practice or speak to your vet if you would like to know more about the Garth Pig Health Scheme or to sign up to it.

Split suckling works... doesn't it?

Split suckling is one of those things that just makes sense for big litters:

Piglets are born without antibodies → they need colostrum.

Colostrum is limited → in big litters there is less to go around.

Big piglets are stronger and get more colostrum → if we take them off the sow, the small piglets have a better chance.

It all makes perfect sense! But, when the scientists look into the birth weights, weight gain and weaning weights, as well as the behaviour of the piglets post-weaning and carcass quality at slaughter, the results aren't always as one would expect. The conclusions after these trials range from no effect to positive effects but only in the first 24h, to negative effect where the split suckled litters actually have higher mortality and lower weaning weights from disrupting the suckling behaviour. However, it is hard to reach a firm conclusion from the published research because there is not a consensus on how to apply split-suckling, in terms of duration, which piglets should be

isolated, number of groups to make, group sizes, and when to start.

In practice, a slightly counterintuitive approach often works best: take off the small piglets first. Piglets lose body temperature very quickly after birth and are not very good at getting warm again, especially piglets born light. A hypothermic piglet does not have the energy to suckle and will not benefit from easy access to a teat. If the small piglets are put under a lamp to warm up first (and give them an oral energy boost at the right time), they will have more vitality to suckle when they are put back on the sow. Another possibly counterintuitive practice is to leave the medium piglets on the sow when the smalls are put back to suckle. In the first hours after farrowing, milk is released spontaneously but after 16h or so, milk release is dependent on stimulation of the udder and is synchronised from all teats at the same time. The underweight piglets will benefit from the stronger piglets initiating the suckling sequence, as long as there are enough teats for the number of piglets.

One thing that does seem clear is that there is no benefit split suckling for more than a day, unless a double nursing method is used where one sow rears two litters simultaneously. But maybe that's something for another newsletter!

TOP TIP FROM BRIAN

Rodents

Rats can have a significant impact on productivity and financial losses on the pig farm. They pose serious risks by spreading diseases like Leptospirosis and Salmonella, contaminating feed, and causing costly damage to buildings by chewing wires and insulation.

A rat can eat approximately 10% of its body weight in feed in each day, equating to roughly 10Kg of feed per rat per year. Based on one pair of rats producing up to 200 offspring per year – you do the maths -that's a lot of feed!!!

Make sure you have an active rodent pest control plan in operation and check it regularly to ensure it is working. Rodenticide use and records must meet the requirements of legislation and assurance schemes. Keeping the farm clean and tidy will also help reduce the numbers of vermin you have.

Meet Our New Members of the Team

Hedwich

We are delighted to introduce you to our new vet Hedwich Oosterhof, who joined us in January 2025 and will be based in Scotland.

Hedwich grew up in Friesland, the Netherlands and graduated from Utrecht University in 2018. She moved to Scotland straight after graduation and has worked both as a mixed vet and a farm vet in several places

across the country. She now lives in Aberdeenshire and will be joining us from there. In her spare time, she enjoys taking her dog for hikes, spending time in the gym or trips for weekend adventures.



Gabby

We are also delighted to introduce you to Gabrielle Atling (Gabby) who joined the Integra dispensing team at the start of January.

Originally from Essex, Gabby has called Norfolk home for the past five years and has been happily swapping traffic jams for running trails ever since.

When not with the team at Integra, Gabby loves exploring the beautiful local forest with her running club or wandering through Norfolk's countryside. Her idea of a perfect day? A long walk or bike ride with a stop for a flask of tea and a piece of cake!



.....a little reminder:

Integra opening hours are from 9am – 5pm. Thank you.