



FACT SHEET

May 2016

GROWER- FINISHER CARE & CONSIDERATION

Sometimes looking after porker/grower/finisher pigs can be damn hard and not particularly appealing work. They can be quite big animals that are more difficult to catch, mark and treat than piglets and weaners. Also, our growing herds can be so large that sometimes it can be difficult to see the pigs individually and not as a population. The best stock-people seem to have the knack of looking after lots of pigs well by caring for each pig singly i.e. seeing each pig independently as regards their requirements; this seems to hold true whether they're looking after 20 or 2000 animals. The best way to achieve this is by looking at the pigs and teaching yourself to see the pigs as individuals and a good way to start is by setting up a structured shed tour. Ideally this should take place at least twice each day with the morning walk taking the longest and being the most intensive, and the afternoon walk taking place just before knock-off to make sure that water, feed and environment are all ok before you leave for the day.

In the morning you need to make sure that you cover all bases as far as a pig's requirements and comfort. These include:

- Temperature;
- Ventilation;
- Feed availability;
- Water;
- Health;
- Proximity to other animals and
- Cleanliness

When doing your tour through the sheds and surrounds, try and carry it out at the same time each day. That way, things that are different (as far as the environment is concerned) will stand out; well that's the idea any way!



Temperature

When a pig is kept at a temperature that it feels best, it will eat well, be more robust and generally do what a healthy growing pig does best and just grow. The temperature range recommended for a growing pig between 50-120kg liveweight, is about 15-25°C. Growing pigs become less sensitive to the cold but more sensitive to the heat as they grow. Many sheds now are electronically controlled or at the very least may have max min thermometers located in the shed. But don't rely on them exclusively as observing the pigs is still the best way to determine if they are comfortable. For example, a pig may be too cold at 25°C in a strong breeze. On the other hand, 25°C may be too hot for the same pig in slow moving, humid air. A cold pig will huddle with others, shiver and keep its feet tucked in well, to avoid contact with the cold floor. It will also eat more which will affect feed efficiency. A hot pig tries to lay well away from pen mates, it will increase contact with the floor, trying to cool down. It will also pant, and it will eat less. They will also tend to



play with drinkers and foul areas of the pen they normally keep clean, as they attempt to make a wallow for themselves. (Weaning To Sale, 1998, van Barneveld, Mullan and Slade. PRDC).

Ventilation

Shed ventilation refers to the exchange of air between the inside of a shed and the outside. It's important to reach a happy medium so that you don't have too much air movement which chills the pigs, or too little which can lead to a build up in contaminants such as CO₂, ammonia, hydrogen sulphide (rotten egg gas) or dust. Most grower-finisher sheds in Australia are naturally ventilated, although there are sheds which are mechanically ventilated. Automatic controllers assist with taking much of the guess work out of raising and lowering blinds, but always remember to observe the pigs!



Feed

As you're walking through the sheds, take time to listen to the auger, is it running properly or is there a blockage somewhere? Perhaps the feed bridged in the silo and has stopped flowing? If the auger is off, check and make sure the feeders have filled and pigs can access the feed, this means, no blocked outlets and clean feed available for all pigs, free from any mould or

muck. Also are the feeders adjusted properly? Too little and the pigs will be hungry and their growth rates will be poor; too much and the pigs may waste it. Poor feed availability is especially damaging to younger pigs, so always check that their feeders are full, feed outlets aren't blocked, properly adjusted and that the feed is clean. If they are not eating and you've checked all the above points, check the water!

Water

When checking the pigs make sure nipple drinkers are working correctly i.e. not only should water be there but at the correct flow rate. Pigs will only devote a certain amount of time and effort towards obtaining their daily water requirements. Too many pigs per drinker, low drinker flow rates and bad positioning can cause reduced water intake. If access to water is restricted, pigs will reduce their water intake resulting in a lower feed intake and slower growth performance. So....

- Check flow rates especially when sprays and sprinklers are working.
- Make sure there's enough working drinkers per pen
- Make sure drinkers aren't positioned too high or too low for the pigs in the pen
- Have water quality checked by a reputable laboratory regularly.





Health

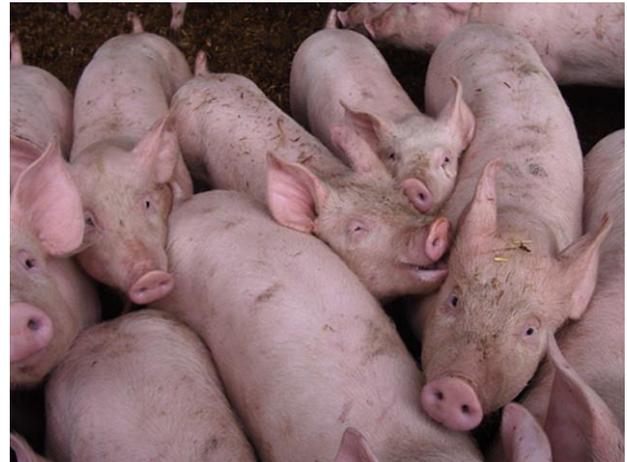
Prevention is always better than cure so attention to detail regarding pen & shed maintenance as well as effective cleaning and hygiene will go a long way in assisting with ensuring the health of the pigs. Also be sure to keep to the vaccination schedules in place for your pigs. That being said, growing pigs still need to be checked at least once daily (preferably twice daily) for any signs that something is not quite right.

How do you detect a sick pig from a large group (sometimes hundreds of pigs) of pigs? Physical signs are usually a dead giveaway for sick pigs, but it would be great if you can detect a problem before it gets so severe. How do you do that? One word....behaviour! Look for the tell-tale signs that tell you a problem is brewing. Check for pigs that are reacting or behaving differently from the group. For example, pigs with meningitis, will tend to move away from the rest of the group, and appear “fluffy” with their hair standing on end, before they actually show other more pronounced symptoms such as paddling. The quicker you can treat the problem, the better it is for the animal. Your veterinarian will have provided your farm with guidelines and protocols for animal treatment. Refer to that and treat animals as quickly as possible

Proximity to other pigs (stocking rate)

Recommended stocking rates for the different classes of growing pigs in conventional housing are found in the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of pigs (2007). The minimum available floor area for weaners, growers and finishers in the Code is calculated as m^2 per pig = $0.030 \times \text{bodyweight}$ (Spooler et al 2000), with this space allowance being clear space, without partitions or obstructions. Space recommendations in the Code are 30% greater for pigs housed in deep litter systems, than pigs in conventional sheds to assist with litter management. Overcrowding has serious impacts on the welfare and health of pigs, even with sufficient feeder space and nipple drinkers. If you have an overproduction problem because of improved

efficiencies, don't be tempted to overstock; build more sheds or reduce sow numbers.



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