



# BEST PRACTICE FOSTERING

## GUIDELINES FOR FOSTERING: GETTING THE “ONE PER CENTERS” RIGHT

### Project Participants

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### Problem

Pre-weaning mortality is the major cause of production loss in the farrowing area. Around 80 per cent of piglet losses occur in the first 72 hours after farrowing, and are often due to a lack of colostrum. Mortality rises with increasing litter size, and as such, piglets will often need to be fostered to ensure they survive.

### Project

*Guidelines for Fostering: Getting the “one per centers” right* is a manual which will assist farrowing house staff in the everyday tasks which impact the successful fostering of piglets.

### Value for Producers

There are a number of animal husbandry tasks which need to be done well to guarantee successful piglet fostering. Piglet survival and growth can be maximised by following the principles outlined below.

## Background

Newborn piglets have 2 main requirements which must be met soon after birth to ensure survival:

- 1) Temperature - newborn piglets have very little stored energy reserves and require extra heat from a lamp or heater to keep warm and active. Cold piglets cannot compete for teats, suckle properly or move around the pen to avoid being lain on by the sow, and are more susceptible to infections.
- 2) Colostrum - colostrum is essential for the survival of piglets because it is rich in energy and passes immunity from the mother to her litter. The quality and amount of colostrum consumed influences growth and development for most of the pig's life. Colostrum concentration is highest at farrowing but falls rapidly during the first 14 hours. Management techniques such as split suckling can allow for a more even intake of colostrum between piglets.

Fostering is a process whereby piglets are moved from one sow to another and should only be done to ensure piglets have access to colostrum.

## Recommendations

The temperature needs of piglets (Table 1) and sows differ dramatically:

Table 1. Temperature requirements for piglets in the farrowing shed

Time after farrowing	Temperature requirements for piglets (degrees Celsius)
First 48 hours	30-36
Rest of the first week	30-32
Second week	28-30
Third week	26-28
Fourth week	24-26

If piglets are huddled directly under the heat source or next to or on top of the sow, they are too cold. If piglets are spread out away from the heat source, they are too hot.

Piglets that are too cold will be unable to reach a teat and attach properly, decreasing colostrum intake.

Colostrum intake will also be affected by litter size, and as such, it may be necessary to foster piglets to ensure they have access to colostrum. Note that this is the only reason piglets should be fostered; fostering to create uniformity in litters is not advised.

Fostering works best when carried out during the first 24 hours during lactation and care should be taken when selecting nurse or foster sows; they should be parity one to three, have at least 12 well-formed and functional teats, be well-natured, in good body condition, and have looked after their own pigs well. If gilts must be selected, they should receive as many piglets as they have teat capacity for.

Foster litters should be checked frequently, especially for the first 2 to 3 days after fostering.

## More Information

- For a copy of the manual, contact Rachael Bryant at [rachael.bryant@australianpork.com.au](mailto:rachael.bryant@australianpork.com.au)
- For technical information, contact Rebecca Athorn at [rebecca.athorn@australianpork.com.au](mailto:rebecca.athorn@australianpork.com.au)