



# Farrowing House Series

## - Krannestrup

Krannestrup is a 1,350-sow family-run farm owned by Niels Aage Arve, his son Kristian, and managed by Rene Dejgaard Thomsen. Annually the farm produces 46,000 pigs; approximately 25,000 are sold at 30kg, with remainder grown out to market weight. The sow herd is currently 60% Hendrix Genetics, but is in the process of transitioning to DanBred genetics, with DanBred Top Duroc semen.



### Reduced-confinement pens

- **Pen size:** 2.1 x 3 = 6.3m<sup>2</sup>
- **Number:** 348 pens installed in 2012
- **Schedule:** weekly farrowing
- **Floor:** 1/3 cast iron slats, 2/3 solid concrete
- **Creep:** alongside aisle way, sawdust added pre-farrowing with flooring and lamp heating.
- **Enrichment:** straw provided daily to floor while sow is confined, and via a basket while loose.
  
- **Successful modifications:** repositioning of the side wall to the middle of the pen allows for better teat access whilst sow is confined.
- **Improvement opportunity:** Rene believes the current pen design includes too much solid flooring, causing hygiene concerns and risk of piglet crushing. Consider fully slatted flooring and a square pen layout (e.g. 2.4 x 2.4m).

### Sow and piglet management

After acclimatisation to pens, sows are confined two days before their expected due date, until 3 - 4 days post-farrowing. Gilts, being more agile, are often allowed loose earlier, which helps them remain calm and reduces labour demands associated with hand feeding when the animals are confined. All sows receive non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pain relief post-farrowing.

The farm has moved away from litter equalisation and split suckling, due to additional labour without providing significant benefits. Additional piglets are managed via nurse sows with up to 30% of pens allocated each week to support piglet care.

Where necessary, gilts and sows are given up to two additional piglets beyond the number of functional teat to raise - provided they could successfully raise that number in the previous parity.

Piglets are processed on the second day of life, including iron injections and tail docking, with males left entire. Creep feed is introduced from the first week to encourage early feed intake. Sows are removed the day before weaning, once piglets are on average 29 days of age, weighing roughly 5.9kgs.

## Learning the system

The farm employs ten staff, with 3.5 team members assigned specifically to the farrowing unit. Weekly meetings are held to review productivity and ensure collaborative planning across the farm. The team is a mix of Danish and international workers, all experienced in pig production and working effectively as a team.

New employees are introduced by shadowing an experienced stockperson, allowing them to learn procedures with one-on-one supervision. The farrowing manager works exclusively on the care of sows and newborn piglets during their first week of life, which they believe is crucial for getting piglets off to a good start.

When the farm transitioned to a reduced-confinement system, the changes were not limited to sow and piglet management. Staff also needed to learn how the new pen designs function and identify which features needed improvements.

Initially, staff expressed concerns about safety and the potential for confrontations with loose-housed sows; however, these worries eased as the sows are confined for the farrowing duration.

Rene admits that while some tasks, such as catching piglets, can take longer in the new system compared to traditional crates, other tasks, like moving sows and piglets in and out of pens, have become easier. Initially, pre-weaning mortality was quite high, around 20% during the years post-transition; however, this figure has since improved, dropping to around 16% in the last two years, with 19.2 piglets born alive per litter. This improvement has been partially attributed to genetic changes and reduced disease impact with circovirus outbreaks that previously caused early farrowing and weak piglets.

**“ If you stay calm and relaxed,  
she will stay calm and relaxed ”**

- Rene, on respecting the sow in her environment.

## Advice to farmers

While most tasks, such as disease management, reproduction, and nutrition, remain consistent with crated production systems, reduced-confinement systems require more time and a higher level of animal management and stockmanship.

A key difference is that piglet mortality can escalate quickly if problems aren't addressed promptly. This system demands close observation and individual attention to each pen.

Rene insists that respecting the sow is critical; staff must make themselves known before they enter her space.



*APL continues to support traditional farrowing systems while recognising and supporting research into alternative systems, balancing the health and welfare of sow, piglets and the people caring for them. Research is part of our commitment to demonstrating science led animal welfare which underpins our commitment to continual improvement in the care of our pigs and our people.*



### MORE INFORMATION

For technical information, contact the APL team at [extension@australianpork.com.au](mailto:extension@australianpork.com.au)