



Farrowing House Series - Tvilumgaard

Owned by husband and wife, Thomas and Susanne Kuhr, Tvilumgaard is a 580-sow herd, farrow to finish system. Recent infrastructure upgrades have allowed for annual production of 23,000 slaughter pigs, with future works aiming to increase sow capacity to 750. Tvilumgaard herd uses DanBred genetics for both maternal and sire lines.

Reduced-confinement pens

- Pen size: 3.3 x 2 = 6.6m²
- Number: 190 pens installed in late 2024
- Schedule: weekly farrowing
- Floor: fully cast iron slats, concrete creep and creep entry
- Creep: alongside aisle way, opposite sow head when confined, sawdust added regularly, with floor and lamp heating set to a cooling curve
- Enrichment: straw is always available to the sow via a basket
- Benefits: self designed pen via trial and error at an old site. Rounded, coated bars for comfort, thermoregulation and longevity. Safe spaces for piglets around entire pen edge. Sufficient teat access from all directions.
- Improvement opportunity: milk cups were installed but are now used as a secondary water point for piglets.



Sow and piglet management

After a 4 - 7 day acclimatisation period, sows are confined two days before their due date. The farm is currently trialling loose farrowing for gilts. Crates are typically opened two days after farrowing, though this may be extended to four days for smaller or weaker litters. Split suckling is only used when there's a significant time gap between the first and last piglets born, or when there is a large variation in birth weights.

In an average week, 20% of pens are used for nurse sows to manage large litter sizes, with born alive per litter sitting at 19.9. However, there is a strong focus on keeping piglets with their mothers to support milk production and allow sows to raise as many of their piglets as possible.

Piglets are processed on day one, including tail docking, although phasing this practice out is under consideration. Males are kept entire and immunocastrated later in life. Piglets are weaned around 25 days of age, weighing roughly 6.5kgs.

Tvilumgaard has achieved a notably low piglet mortality rate, especially given their recent transition to reduced confinement pens. Susanne attributes this success to ending surgical castration of male piglets (reducing infection risks) and the benefits of allowing sows to move freely during lactation.

"..being loose is good for the sow, her whole body is working better.. she's giving more milk, you get stronger pigs, less mortality..our goal is to have piglet mortality under 7%..we are currently below that.."

Learning the system

Tvilumgaard's sow site is staffed by three full-time Romanian workers who have effectively worked together for the past five years. While tasks like medicating sows and catching piglets can be more challenging in this system, staff note that these simply require more time, care and individual attention, and therefore have staff dedicated to sow and young piglet care during and post farrowing.

The team has adapted well to the new system and are encouraged to engage more closely with the

sow, to approach them with caution and learn to read their behavioural signals.

Although Susanne acknowledges they are still refining some of the finer details, she says the major challenges were addressed within the first 6 months of the transition. Once construction of the staff tea room is complete, the farm plans to roll out farrowing unit training for all staff, even those working in other areas of the farm.

Advice to farmers

Susanne believes that the farms smooth transition is due to the teams readiness and strong preparation. Her advice to other producers is "to go for it", noting they have never seen such great production results as they have in their new system. However, she also acknowledges the importance of planning for the future.

The farm's infrastructure was originally designed to support 35 weaned pigs/sow/year, but they have now stabilised to over 40 piglets/sow/year, creating a new challenge, as current facilities lack the space to accommodate the extra piglets. Based on this experience, Susanne encourages producers to plan beyond their immediate needs:

“ It is really important to consider the needs of future production, be sure that what is implemented is not only meeting capacity, but what is possible into the future ”



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