

Extended Care for Piglets

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Raising healthy pigs is a key goal for any swine farm, and this plan begins with the newborn piglet. The swine industry recently encouraged farms to consider twenty-four/seven pig care during farrowing (birth), seeking to decrease stillbirth and pre-weaning mortality. The objectives of the present study were to determine the differences between litters raised under an extended care system (Treatment ~16 hours per day) when compared with contemporary litters raised under a typical eight-hour per day (Control) care system. Specifically we wanted to determine if pre-weaning mortality and stillbirth rates were lower in litters receiving extended care. Data were collected on two OSU swine farms, with eighteen randomly assigned pregnant sows in the control group and fourteen assigned to the treatment group. The sows on trial were checked every twenty minutes during the time of expected farrowing, and records of piglet birth weight and viability were recorded. Assigned farm personnel observed control sows at farrowing approximately every 30 minutes within a standard workday. Data for total piglets born, total piglets born alive, number of stillborn piglets, and records of death from birth to weaning were collected on all litters. Sows farrowed a similar number of pigs born and number born alive. Results showed a trend ($P=0.09$) for the number of stillborn piglets per litter to be reduced (0.47 pigs/litter) when compared with the Control. No treatment sows had greater than one stillborn piglet per litter; whereas, 3 of 18 sows in the Control group had at least 2 stillborn piglets per litter. Birth vigor ($n=206$) was not highly influential in survival to weaning, nor did treatment influence survival to weaning of live pigs. We conclude that extended care shows promise for reducing stillborn rates in piglets, particularly in situations where multiple stillbirths are observed.