

Preliminary experiences – pens for loose lactating sows with large litters



Chief Scientist
Vivi Aarestrup
Moustsen,
SEGES

Introduction

In Denmark, both hyper-prolific sows and loose housing are on the agenda.

Hyper-prolific sows give birth to large litters. This leads to use of **nurse** sows, leading to the **relocation** of many piglets., which is both time consuming and reduce the growth of the piglets.

It is part of the Danish **industry's strategy** that lactating sows are loose in the future.

The **aim** of this pre-test was to arrange prototypes of farrowing pens for loose sows with large litters (20 pigs) with access to supplementary milk for the piglets. The larger pens with supplementary milk is to be considered as an alternative to nurse sows.

Results

In all 4 pen designs:

For the sow it was considered easy for her to turn around, get up and lie down and access fresh food and water

For the piglets it was considered easy for them to access solid-floored lying area (at least for the first 14 days of life).

For the staff it was considered easy to prepare pens for use, to enter pens for piglet tasks and supervision, to check the sow's trough and there was no heavy lifting

A few **loose sows nursed** - with supplementary milk - **18-20 piglets** until weaning. Work routines must be adapted to the longer distances within the pens and to larger litters.

Although limited number of farrowings, there appeared to be a time effect on **piglet mortality** with piglets dying earlier in zero confinement and later in temporary confinement pens.

Amongst **challenges** were placement of supplementary milk, so it was easy for the piglets to access but without being within reach of the sow. Another challenge was for staff to adopt work-routines to the larger footprints of the pens.

Materials and methods

With the workshop **LLS18** as a starting point, a follow-up workshop with the suppliers of the DK pork-industry was held. After which **two suppliers of pen equipment** enrolled in the pre-test. Both companies developed two designs – one with zero confinement and one with option to confine.

The pens were installed in **four herds** with one-two designs per herd.

For **12 months**, SEGES collected **data, video-sampling** and '**every-day-use-experiences**' from staff.



Conclusion

The 4 loose lactation pen designs can house large litters when supplementary milk is available but need optimised with further research on:

Encouraging early uptake of supplementary milk, lower crushing risk, and improved management.