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Introduction to pig farming

[Domestication of pigs](#) began a long time ago, when they were merely treated as scavengers; they gradually evolved as they are now domesticated for home consumption and commercial purposes.

Statistics show that **there has been an increase in pig production all over the world**, with *China* being the leading producer of pigs (*Kyriazakis, 2006*). There are various breeds of pigs examples include: *Yorkshire, Landrace, Duroc, Chester White, Spotted, Hampshire and Poland China* (*Gillespie, 1997*).

Several factors have to be put in place when rearing pigs in an intensive unit. Arid to semi-arid environments often pose a challenge when it comes to pig rearing. **Costly [feed supply](#)** such as maize which is the main ingredient in feed diets **has resulted in a significant drop in pig production** especially in an intensive setup.

How to manage pigs in a confined area

[Well managed](#) piggery units yield great profits for a farmer or organization.



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Crucial factors to consider when rearing pigs:

- **Biosecurity: effective disease control measures** ought to be put in place **to minimize spread of diseases** from the outside into the piggery unit. The initiatives are basically:
 - **footbaths for the employees** as they enter a piggery unit/section;
 - strict **control of cellular phones** which are often neglected by most as they move with people everywhere;
 - specific clothing for employees in the piggery unit, in order to guarantee that **home clothes will not be exposed to the pigs in case of a disease outbreak.**
- **Adequate nutrition**: **Sufficient well balanced nutrition** has to be fed at all times, in particular trace mineral elements magnesium, sodium, copper, calcium, iron, zinc, selenium etc.
- **Cooling facilities**: Pigs do not have sweat glands, hence they rely heavily on support from the farmer especially in the summer months. **Use of water sprinklers and fans are appropriate to regulate the pigs' body temperature.** Since, extreme high temperatures may result in pigs succumbing to stress and eventually death.
- **Manure disposal sites**: Ideal disposal of manure on a farm has to be put into consideration, as **frequent contact with manure may promulgate disease** causing micro-organisms.
- **Avoid mixing different age groups**: So as to **minimize bullying** among sows, boars and piglets. When feeding one may be faced with a serious challenge of bullying.
- **Routine vaccinations**: Different geographical zones often succumb to different diseases.
- **Clean supply of water**: Clean water **enhances the smooth growth of pigs and suppression of water borne diseases.** A water nipple

system set up is quite convenient as it reduces wastage of water.

Management of different pig units/section

1. **Service unit:** When handling boars and sows in this section one has to be vigilant, as this **is the unit that deals with artificial insemination (AI), whereby breeding sows are artificially inseminated.**
 - **Artificial insemination:** Barrows commonly referred to as teasers are used to stimulate sows on to come on heat often seen when sow ears are erect and standing still, hence ready for insemination.
 - **Natural mating:** therefore a boar is placed in a unit with sows to be served by the boar. Upon successful mating, the boar can be separated from the sows.
1. **Farrowing unit:** In a farrowing unit it is equally important to note that an employee ought to be always on standby. Uniquely a sow's gestation period is three months, three weeks and three days which totals to 114 days. During farrowing several complications may arise such as a breech, a scenario whereby an unborn piglet blocks passage for other unborn piglets. Therefore, **assistance may be required to facilitate smooth farrowing.** Sometimes a sow may accidentally lay on top of newly farrowed piglets. **Use of farrowing crates that specifically isolate the sow from accidentally stepping all over the pen are quite ideal** unlike open pens that may result in the death of many piglets when accidentally stepped on by sows.

NB: Helping piglets **suckle** and placing them under infrared lights when

the sow is still farrowing is advisable.

Managing piglets

Studies have shown that sow **milk gradually decreases after farrowing therefore, creep feeding may be introduced as a supplement.** Piglets are weaned from the sow at 28 days old, however, weaker piglets may stay a-little longer in the farrowing unit.

Fostering among sows is a common phenomenon, whereby immediately after farrowing **weaker piglets are selected and given to another sow.** Delays in this process may result in a sow resenting fostered piglets.

The advantage of fostering is that it minimizes bullying in piglets, as often happens when stronger piglets get a tit in-front whereas the weaker ones at the back and sometimes may still suckle from other tits. Hence, if this goes unnoticed **the piglet's health may deteriorate.**

Understanding terminologies:

Boar: male pig

Sow: female pig

Barrow: castrated male pig

Piglets: young piglet

Furrowing: act of parturition in pigs

Creep feed: a solid diet given to piglets from seven days onwards

Conclusion

Even if it is a basic intensive farming operation, a few challenges remain because of the cramped system in which animals are farmed. Issues such as ***management, hygiene and disease outbreaks need careful thought.***

A proper management system significantly contributes to the success of a piggery unit.

References

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