

Prevention of Pig Losses on the Farm

IN the last issue of the "Journal" an article contributed by the Livestock Division dealt with the causes of the losses of pigs through condemnation at the works and how these losses could be reduced by the correct treatment of the conditions and diseases causing carcasses to be condemned. This article by the Livestock Division, which will be concluded in next month's issue of the "Journal," describes the treatment and prevention of ailments and parasitic conditions resulting in losses on the farm, which are probably greater than those recorded in the works.

FROM existing data it appears that 25 to 30 per cent. of all pigs born in this country perish before the litter is weaned. Most of them are either born dead, die very soon after birth, or are overlain, and many farmers feel that there is very little they can do about such losses. However, the significant differences in results achieved by some farmers and those obtained by others indicate that production can be increased through knowledge of the pitfalls and the application of this knowledge in attention to detail in management. It is certain that no other aspect of pig management will repay attention better than the study of the causes of losses in litters. If these losses were reduced to even half, it would mean that the present production of pigs could be obtained with 10,000 fewer sows or, alternatively, better use of the present number of sows would provide an extra 100,000 pigs for fattening each year.

The causes of most of the losses in young pigs are given below, together with notes on prevention and treatment where specific troubles are involved.

Pig producers with sick pigs are entitled to receive the assistance of the local pig council supervisor to obtain the advice of a qualified veterinarian. Most pig producers today are members of a veterinary club, and thus advice is more readily available than it has ever been before. Proper diagnosis of the trouble is essential, and no written advice can take the place of the personal services of a veterinarian in treating ailments of animals.

Inadequate Feeding of Pregnant Sow

Inadequate or improper feeding of the sow results in poorly-developed piglets, which lack constitution and resistance to infection. They are weakly, make poor attempts to suckle, and are much more liable to succumb to inclement weather within the first



The basis of profitable pig production is the raising of large litters of healthy and quick-growing pigs. Good management of the breeding sows aims at securing high average numbers born and the reduction of losses to a minimum.

day or two. Survivors are more liable to overlying by the sow and are highly susceptible to scours, navel-ill, and other specific troubles affecting suckers.

Though sows may become too fat during their dry period, a far more common fault is that they are undernourished, and though they may appear to be in fair order at farrowing, they have not had adequate protein-rich feed in the latter part of pregnancy to build up body reserves and well-developed piglets. Quality rather than quantity is required in the sow's ration, and during the last 6 weeks of pregnancy she should have at least 2 gallons of skimmed milk or 2lb. of meat meal daily in addition to the grazing and other bulk feeds she may be getting.

It is a mistake to leave individual feeding until the sow is brought in to her farrowing pen at, say, 3 weeks before she is due to farrow. Thus, individual dry-sow feeding bails in the piggery layout should be used more widely than they are today. In the final week the bulk of the ration should be reduced and, though the sow's bowels should be kept normal through exercise and access to grazing, she should be kept on a light ration until she has settled down again after farrowing. A gradual increase in the ration to a maximum after 3 weeks or so is then sufficient to maintain the sow in good condition and avoid digestive upsets which may interrupt her milk supply and make her more liable to overlie her piglets.

Management at Farrowing

Though there is little an attendant can do to help a sow at farrowing, observation of the farrowing may well

be worth the trouble, provided the sow is used to the attendant and is not upset by his presence. Normally if the sow has been properly accustomed to her farrowing quarters and provided with a little short bedding, she will make her farrowing bed and should not then be disturbed; nothing but clean water should be put in her trough. If the observer notices that the sow is listless or clumsy or exhibits any cannibalistic tendency, he may, in a quiet manner, give such assistance as may be necessary or remove the piglets until farrowing is complete and then return them to the sow for suckling.

If a high proportion of the litter is overlain and there are no complications such as milk fever or other abnormal symptoms which could cause overlying, it is possible that the sow is of a careless, poor mothering temperament, and it is therefore not worth persevering with her as a breeding sow.

A draughtproof farrowing house of 8ft. x 8ft. floor area with control yard as recommended in plans obtainable from the Department of Agriculture or district pig councils is a help in reducing losses. Though there is some difference of opinion about farrowing rails, bedding, etc., it is felt that under New Zealand conditions, where attention at farrowing is frequently impracticable, they are worth the small cost involved. A limited amount of short bedding only should be used. A floor with a slope of 8in. in 5ft. to a hover board or farrowing rail, under which the piglets get protection, is recommended in some overseas countries. Experience with this type of floor in this country is as yet insufficient to make any recommendation upon it.