

EARLY WEANING OF PIGS . . .

Two-litter System

Where for any reason a farmer is unable to give the required attention to sow management to secure continuing good results, a system of working entirely with young sows, taking only two litters from them before disposing of them as choppers, may be considered. The most promising gilts from the winter litters would be kept for breeding, being mated to farrow when approximately 12 months old.

Flexibility is desirable to allow for the best of the sows to be carried over for a second, or even third, season. If more gilts are mated than will be required, there will be a ready sale at remunerative prices for the surplus houses with covered creep.

Feeding Method

In Mr Searle's piggery the winter litters are farrowed in the dual-purpose houses, which permit full control over sows and litters. Some summer litters are farrowed in the open-run houses and when a week or so old are brought into the control houses with covered creeps.

The pigs are encouraged into the creep at as early an age as possible. With the palatable special early weaning starter foods now available little difficulty is experienced in getting the litter started in the creep from 10 days old. For the first few days a little of the meal is put in the trough of a self-feeder and replenished as it is cleaned up; then the meal is put in the self-feeder and is always available to the litter.

After a week or so No. 1 pellets are gradually introduced and a progressive changeover made so that when the time for weaning (4 weeks) arrives the litter will have been on pellets only for a day or two.

Weaning

Management

Mr Searle has been using the side creep of the house for the purpose for which it was originally designed, but he wants a small kennel into which he can concentrate enough pigs for them to maintain a comfortable warmth. Therefore, on weaning, he switches the sleeping floor to this creep area (some 5 ft x 3 ft), covers it with a well insulated lid,

and hangs a sack over the entrance to keep the heat in.

In this kennel he concentrates two litters totalling 16 to 20 pigs. They thrive without artificial heat when bedded on 2 or 3 in. of wood shavings. These are held in position by concrete blocks placed on their sides and moved to provide an expanding sleeping floor as required by the pigs.

This handy method is also followed for providing an expanding sleeping floor when the pigs outgrow the creep area and are returned at about 5 weeks to the main sleeping floor of the house. After pigs have been a week or so here any that are backward are returned to the kennel, kept longer on pellets, and given an antibiotic supplement.

Feeding after Weaning

No. 1 pellets are continuously available in the self-feeder for the first few days after weaning. These, with clean water, provide all the feed. After three or four days a home-mixed meal comprising three parts of barley meal (finely ground) and one part of buttermilk powder (and perhaps 10 per cent of meat meal) is introduced as a slop mixed with a little milk and fed in a separate small trough. The ration is increased gradually and made more sloppy with additional milk. When the pigs are taking this readily the No. 1 pellets are withdrawn and the slop gradually increased until when pigs are eight weeks old the feed ration per pig is as follows:

Morning feed: $\frac{1}{2}$ lb meal and $\frac{1}{4}$ gallon skim milk (slop)

Midday: $\frac{1}{4}$ gallon of skim milk

Evening: $\frac{1}{2}$ lb of meal and $\frac{1}{4}$ gallon of skim milk (slop)

This is the first stage at which any skim milk is given as a drink. It has

been found that in this way scours have been minimised. Cleanliness, which is so essential in this system of management, is more readily achieved with this type of feeding.

Meal is gradually increased to a maximum of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb per pig daily. From that stage onward the milk portion only of the ration is increased.

The greatest importance is placed on avoidance of overfeeding. The quantity given at each feed is so adjusted that 95 per cent of it is cleaned up quickly.

More liberal feeding has been found to result in scours. However, they can be quickly eliminated by reducing the milk fed and administering a proprietary aureomycin preparation.

The results obtained by this feeding method have been very satisfactory, and the fact that the growth rate is maintained to the finishing stages is indicated by output. About 20,000 lb of pigmeat was produced during the past season, when 129 cows were milked. This represents 155 lb of pigmeat (equivalent to two porkers) per cow.

Economics of System

Questions which will occur naturally to every practical farmer are:

"How much has been spent on meals to achieve this production?"

"Does it really pay?"

Though it is not primarily the amount of meal used but how efficiently it is used which governs profit, the results for the piggery discussed would indicate that meal feeding had been kept within economic limits. Meals represented about 15 per cent of the total food supply and cost £320 in the past season. When this amount is deducted from gross returns it still leaves a farm return of over £9 per cow from the skim milk.

Essentials to Success

- 1 Interest and determination to implement the plan thoroughly are more important than any superabundance of labour.
- 2 Leaving the litter on the sow until 28 days old.
- 3 Providing a warm bed in a correctly sized coop or kennel which the pigs can keep warm without artificial heat.
- 4 Ad lib. feeding to 8 weeks, using the appropriate special feeds in the early stages.
- 5 Cleanliness.
- 6 Treating otherwise as in ordinary rearing practice; allowing run-out on pasture when conditions are suitable from as early an age as possible.



Weaners are allowed to run out as early as the weather permits. Summer litters have meal always in front of them in the grass run.