



Sow Lactation Intake Important to Longevity and Productivity

Adequate feed intake in lactation is important to sow productivity. Recent information from the University of Minnesota also indicates that adequate lactation intake is essential to promote longevity in high producing sows.

Recently Dr. Mark Whitney, Swine Extension Educator, University of MN Extension, shared a study that was done at a 1275 sow Minnesota herd on the association of farrowing and lactation factors during lactation that were analyzed on the likelihood of sows to be removed from the herd before the next farrowing. Risk of sow removal declined as feed intake over the first 2 weeks of lactation increased. Sows that consumed less than 9 pounds of feed a day during the first 2 weeks of lactation were 27% more likely to be removed from the herd.

These results show the importance of adequate intake from the start of lactation on sow longevity. A number of strategies can be implemented to enhance sow intake. Here is a list of a few of those strategies:

1. Implement an aggressive step-up program to get sows to full feed as soon as possible after farrowing.
2. Keep sows cool. Ideal room temperature is 65° F. Use heat mats or lamps for pigs. Install drip coolers and adjust ventilation fans and air inlets during hot weather.
3. Maintain constant availability of good quality water. The flow rate to each sow should be at least 1 quart per minute.
4. Check feeder design. Can sows eat all of the feed in the feeder? Does the design allow sows to waste feed? Are there sharp edges that inhibit sows from eating?
5. Monitor the physical form of the diet. Do not grind the grain too finely. Some have reported improved intake by grinding sow diets a little coarser, i.e. moving from 750 microns to 900 microns.
6. Keep individual sow records of feed intake. Assure that an accurate amount of feed is being fed. Periodically weight the amount of feed in the scoop that is being used to feed the sows.

Proper body condition is another very important factor. A number of studies have shown that overly conditioned sows at farrowing have reduced lactation intake. Sows with a condition score of 4-5 lose more weight and rebreed poorly. These sows also have a more difficult time farrowing, recuperate slower and are more likely to lay on or crush piglets. Conversely if sows are too thin at farrowing milk production will likely be reduced and future reproductive performance such as wean to estrus interval and farrowing rate will be negatively affected.

Proper body condition begins in gestation. Sows should be evaluated in early gestation and feed intake adjusted accordingly. Feeding to the sow's weight and maintenance needs is more important than feeding to her condition (backfat). Too often producers increase or decrease daily feed amounts during early gestation based on the perceived amount of fat the sow is carrying. However two-thirds to three-fourths of the total energy needs are for maintenance, which is directly related to the sows body weight, not condition. A sow will designate energy for maintenance needs before reproductive or growth purposes. It is important to adjust feed intake amounts based on sow body condition, but only after sow body weight is taken into account.

For sow nutrition formulated to maximize longevity and productivity, we recommend OptiSow EXP. This product contains organic selenium, L-carnitine, chromium tripicolinate, phytase and is fortified with 25% of the trace minerals as organic trace minerals. A summary of the benefits of these nutrients is listed below:

Organic Selenium: Reduces the rate of depletion of body selenium stores.

L-carnitine: Essential to the utilization of fatty acids for needed energy

Chromium tripicolinate: Improves glucose metabolism resulting in a better energy (body condition) status.

Phytase: Improves the availability of phosphorus, calcium, amino acids and trace minerals

Organic Trace Minerals: Improves uterine healing and reduces the incidence of foot claw disorders.

These nutrients are especially important in sows with low intakes, or high nutrient requirements due to increased milk production.

Managing sow feed intake during gestation and lactation to maximize feed intake improves litter performance and increases sow longevity. This improved productivity can lower feed cost per pig weaned by as much as \$3.50-\$4.00 per pig. This provides a better return on investment for swine producers. A sound nutrition program like OptiSow EXP enhances that investment.

For more information contact your local Hubbard Feeds representative.

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