

Handling Spring Litters

Some Suggestions to Help Greater Swine Production and Conservation

Last November and December all of Western Canada was campaigned in the interests of a vastly increased production of pork products. Hundreds of sows were returned from central stockyards and bred and either sold or kept for later distribution among farmers this spring. As most of these sows, along with those already in the farmers' hands, were bred during the month of December, and the period of gestation in the sow is 112 days, a great number of them will farrow in the very near future. There is little use breeding sows unless the utmost steps are taken to conserve the young pigs, and this is one of the most difficult parts of the hog-raising business. Every little pig that dies means the loss of the possibility of making 200 or more pounds of finished pork. Of course, the feed is not lost, but if we are still faced with a great scarcity of hog products now is the time to conserve those we have already bred. This is particularly true when we remember that Spring litters are by far the most successful in Western Canada, and fall litters are apt to be a loss rather than an asset in the hands of any but experienced hog producers.

The following suggestions, prepared by Prof. G. E. Day, one of the best authorities in America on swine production, should be particularly useful at this season.

During the Gestation Period

During the period of gestation the sow should be kept in good, strong condition, but not overloaded with fat. Extremes in condition are to be avoided. A sow may be kept in fairly high condition and will produce satisfactory litters, provided she takes plenty of exercise.

In districts where corn is plentiful, there is a temptation to feed almost exclusively upon corn. Such a method of feeding cannot give the best results, because corn does not furnish enough bone and muscle-forming constituents to properly develop the unborn pigs. It is also rather too fattening and heating to feed in large quantities to a sow at this stage. It is true that corn can be fed, but the ration recommended for the boar—namely, equal parts ground oats, and wheat middlings—will answer very nicely for the sow. The proportion of corn, if fed, should not be over one-third of the meal ration, and wheat middlings or bran may be used to dilute the corn meal without oats.

A meal ration which is preferred by the writer to all others is equal parts ground oats and middlings, leaving out corn altogether. It is possible, however, to use a wide variety of feeds, so long as the feeder realizes the importance of furnishing considerable bulk and of restricting the proportion of heating or highly fattening feeds. As in the case of the boar, the sow requires something besides meal, and the furnishing of some such feeds as roots, or alfalfa, is even more important than in feeding the boar. Skim-milk is also excellent, but is not always available for sows.

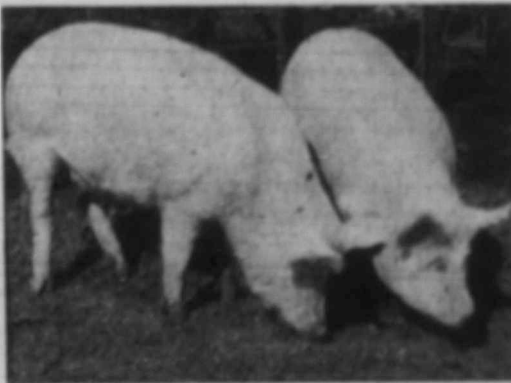
In summer, a pasture field will furnish the bulky part of the ration, and, if sows are in good condition to start with and are given a good pasture, they will get along very well without other feed for two or three months. They should be given a little meal for several weeks before farrowing, to accustom them to its use, and render the change less violent when they are taken into the pens. With regard to the quantity of meal, the feeder must be guided entirely by the condition of the sows. Meal may be fed either wet or dry. When roots are fed, a good plan is to mix the dry meal with pulped roots, though the feeder has wide latitude in regard to the methods he may see fit to follow.

Dangers of Constipation

Constipation is the bane of the swine breeder, and if the sow becomes constipated before she farrows, the chances are that she will lose her pigs, and possibly her own life. Constipation, therefore, is one of the main things to be guarded against at this time. When it once occurs very little can be done to overcome it and save the pigs, so that it is almost altogether a matter of prevention. If a sow is taken directly from a pasture field, shut up in a pen, and fed upon an exclusive meal ration, trouble is almost sure to occur. Radical changes in feeding are to be

avoided, and the ration should be kept practically the same after taking the sow into the pen as it was before. If anything, the feed should be made rather more sloppy, and the green feed or roots should be supplied the same as they were before the sow was taken in. A small amount of linseed meal (oil meal) or ground flaxseed added to the ration is also helpful in preventing constipation. The wisdom of feeding meal to sows while on pasture for a time before they farrow can be readily appreciated, as it prevents a violent change in their ration. The sow should also be given a chance and encouraged to take exercise.

The farrowing pen should be dry, well ventilated, and free from draughts. It is a good plan to provide the pen with a guard rail made of 2 by 8-in. planks fastened with their edges against the sides of the pen a little above the bed. These prevent the sow from lying against the partition, and lessen the



A Pair of Typp Young Yorkshires Sows. Notice the Length, Smoothness and Quality of these Two Pigs.

danger of injury to the little pigs, which often find the space under the guard a very convenient refuge.

There is a difference of opinion as to the amount of bedding which should be used, some maintaining that the sow should be liberally supplied with bedding, and others that the bedding should be limited. The writer's experience is that active sows in comparatively light condition can generally be trusted with a liberal amount of bedding, but sows which are in high condition, or which are at all clumsy, had better be given only a moderate amount of cut straw.

It pays to treat sows kindly and to have them quiet. If they are on good terms with the attendant and regard him as a friend, there is much less danger of trouble from nervous, excited sows when the critical time of farrowing arrives.

Management After Farrowing

After farrowing the sow should not be disturbed,

gradually increased, taking a week or ten days to reach full feed. A good mother with a large litter requires very liberal feeding, but if the litter is small, it may be necessary to reduce the feed.

Many different rations are used for nursing sows. Equal parts of finely ground oats and wheat middlings, allowed to soak between feeds, makes a most excellent ration. If sweet skim-milk can be added to the mixture, it makes an almost ideal ration. Corn may be used as recommended for sows before farrowing, and in larger quantities if skim-milk is available. A certain amount of roots and green feed are always in order, but the sow should not be expected to subsist upon such feeds at this time. A limited amount of bulky, succulent feed helps to keep the sow healthy.

When the pigs are born, the attendant should be on hand to see that everything goes well. If the pigs are strong and the sow lies quiet, it is better not to interfere. Sows that have been properly fed and given sufficient exercise seldom have difficulty in farrowing.

If the pigs seem somewhat weak, or if the sow is very restless, it is safer to place the pigs in a well-bedded box or basket to keep them out of the way until all are born. If the pen is chilly, a bottle of hot water placed in the bottom of the basket and covered with a blanket, with another blanket over the top of the basket, will help keep up the vitality of the pigs.

The pigs should be placed to the teat to suck as soon as possible. The weaker the pigs, or the colder the pen, the more important an early drink of the mother's milk becomes. If parturition is not unduly protracted, and if the pigs are strong, lively, and comfortable they may wait for their first drink until all are born, but in such matters the attendant must use his judgment. As soon as the sow appears to have settled down quietly, it is best to put the little pigs with her and leave them together. It is well not to interfere except when it is absolutely necessary.

By the time the pigs are three weeks old they will have learned to eat. If at all possible, it is a good plan to give them access to another pen in which is kept a small trough. Here they can be fed a little skim-milk with a very little middlings stirred into it. The quantity of middlings can be increased gradually as the pigs grow older. If they can be taught to nibble at sugar-beets or mangels during this time, so much the better. A small amount of soaked whole corn, or almost any other grain, scattered on the floor of the pen, will cause them to take exercise while hunting for it. If it is not possible to provide an extra pen, the sow may be shut out of the pen while the pigs are being fed. Many people simply allow the young pigs to eat with the sow, and many good pigs are raised in this way, but better results will be obtained if the pigs can be fed separately.

Exercise is very important for young pigs, and every possible means of securing it must be

adopted. If they are kept in a small pen with the mother, some of the best of them will likely become too fat, and probably sicken and die. Outdoor exercise is especially beneficial, but pigs should be protected from cold winds or from a very hot sun. If the sow is turned out with her pigs it is not well to give her a very large range at first, as she is likely to travel too far and unduly tire the pigs.

Boar pigs not intended for breeding purposes should be castrated before weaning, to get the best results, though there is not much danger from castrating at a later date, provided care is exercised in connection with the operation. Clean hands, a clean knife, and the use of a disinfectant upon the wound will obviate practically all danger.

Management After Weaning

If the young pigs have been taught to eat as described, and skim-milk is available, they may be weaned successfully when six weeks old. It is true that many pigs are weaned before they are six weeks old, but it is seldom advisable to do so if they appear to be thriving with the sow. If skim-milk is not available, it is generally advisable to defer weaning for two weeks more, and special pains should be taken to have the pigs well



A Bunch of Finished Market Hogs. The more Little Pigs that are conserved now the more of these finished hogs will be available this fall.

and if she lies quietly for ten or twelve hours, or even more, so much the better. When she wants anything she will go to the trough for it. At first she should have little more than a drink. A very thin slop of middlings and water will answer very well. If the weather is cold, tepid water should be used. During the first three days, great care must be exercised not to over feed, and the ration should be kept very light. After this, the feed may be

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