Iron injecting outdoors sees ROI of more than 10:1!

Farm facts

Name: Basil Baird
Location: West Sussex, Medium to light soil over gravel
Farm size & enterprise: 1800 sow outdoor herd, weaning 36,000 pigs/year

Benefits

- Increased weaning weight of +0.26 kg
- Reduced days to finish
- Return on investment (ROI) of >10:1
- The benefits of iron supplementation seemed more pronounced during colder months of the year

Key to success

- Administering 1 ml Uniferon at 48 hours makes up the shortfall in iron required for today's rapidly growing piglets
- The iron injection fitted easily alongside other litter work on day two, so there was no extra handling of piglets
- The cost of this intervention is small (less than 10 p/piglet) compared to the significant benefit gained from raising weaning weight (£2.50/ finished pig)

Background

Piglets require around 10 mg iron per day for maintenance and growth; however sow milk only contains around 1 mg iron/litre.

In indoor systems the shortfall in iron is usually met by administering 200 mg iron as iron dextran during the first few days of life. If this shortfall is not addressed piglets can become anaemic which leads to poor performance and increased susceptibility to disease.

In most outdoor systems piglets do not receive supplementary iron due to the assumption that piglets acquire sufficient iron from the soil.

> **The results of this trial certainly challenge the assumption that outdoor piglets don't need supplementary iron. I am sure this is an intervention that is justifiable on health, welfare and productivity grounds on many outdoor units.**
>
> ***Richard Pearson, George Vet Group***

The system

The 1800 sows are split into two 900-sow herds with the same genetics, feed and management. This allowed the iron treatment to be rotated on a four weekly basis between the two units, one unit being treated and the other acting as a control.

The treated piglets received 1 ml Uniferon (200 mg iron dextran) at 48 hours of age. Data including number born alive, mortality, number weaned and average weaning weight were recorded for 19,679 piglets.

Blood samples were taken during the study from treated and non-treated piglets in order to assess the effect the iron was having.

Over the period of the trial iron-treated piglets averaged 0.26 kg heavier at weaning. However the affect was much more pronounced during colder weather, at the start of the trial, with weaning weight improvements of 0.60 kg.

No statistical differences were found in number weaned per sow, pre-weaning mortality or the percentage of piglets kept back at weaning.

For more information and advice contact:

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