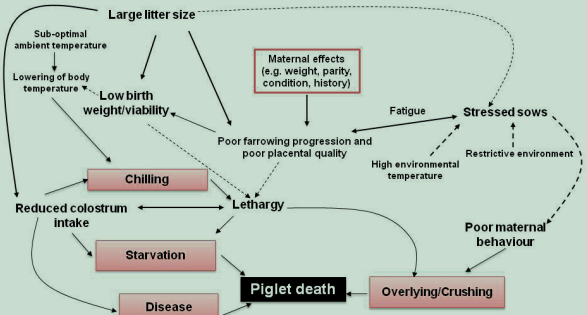
Piglet Survival

Fact Sheet 2.
Reducing live-born mortality

The Challenge

Piglet mortality continues to be a major economic and welfare concern, with 16-20% of the litter dying between birth and weaning. Live-born deaths account for ~12% of this total mortality, with chilling, starvation and crushing by the sow the main ultimate causes. Improving survival from birth to weaning requires coordinated genetic, nutritional, management and stockperson interventions.

Pre-disposing risk factors of live-born mortality



Pre-disposing risk factors of live-born death. Adapted from Edwards & Baxter 2015 in "The gestating and lactating sow" (Wageningen University Press)

SRUC is a charity registered in Scotland, No. SC003712

Leading the way in Agriculture and Rural Research, Education and Consulting

This flyer is produced with support from Universities Innovation Fund, from Scottish Funding Council and is based on multiple research projects on piglet survival by SRUC and collaborators.

Contact: Emma.Baxter@sruc.ac.uk

Piglet Survival Top Tips for management

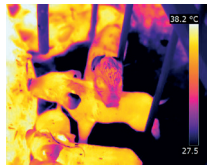
Improve the microclimate for piglets

Piglets are very cold sensitive at birth and are very susceptible to hypothermia.

Tip 1 Provide a local heat source (hat mat or heat lamp; radiant heat lamp best) and covered creep area. Mat/Lamp temp 30-34°C.

Tip 2 **Straw bedding can cut heat loss and dry piglets.** Shredded paper is an alternative.

Caution if using heat lamp keep substrate away from heat.



Piglets cool quickly after birth. Thermal image shows piglet at udder suckling and warming up and another piglet still chilled not suckling.

Improve piglet' suckling chances

Colostrum is key. Colostrum helps with thermoregulation, provides immunity, sustenance and energy.

Tip 3 Assist piglets who are struggling to reach the udder. Colostrum is only available for 48h after birth – make sure all piglets get colostrum. Split suckle if necessary.

Tip 4 Optimise cross-fostering strategies. Only foster after all piglets have had at least 6-12h colostrum from their mother. Foster within 48h. Create litters of even body weight.

Tip 5 Know your sow's udder! Match piglets with teat size and make sure the sow has enough functional teats for the litter.

Help small piglets get colostrum.

Improve maternal behaviour

An active and "satisfying" nesting phase should result in a quiet and inactive farrowing phase allowing safe udder access for piglets.

Tip 6 Sow behaviour will be improved with the correct environment to perform natural behaviours. Ideally loose nesting and farrowing should be achieved, which would reduce stress and promote positive maternal behaviour. Provide nest-building substrate in all farrowing environments at least 48h pre-farrowing. Even in farrowing crates hessian sacks can be affixed to the front of crates as an extra outlet for nesting behaviour.