



# Target

# Farm

# Action

A monthly digest of practical advice for pig farmers from BPEX

## Getting the top score from sows

I recently spoke to a manager of a unit where there were concerns over the condition of sows.

The manager said that sows were looking well on entering the farrowing house, but by weaning many had lost too much condition.

I recommended that he condition score (CS) sows at three stages of production: farrowing, weaning and mid-gestation, on scale of 1 to 5.

It is important to note that condition scoring sows is a little subjective, so it is recommended that the same person does it each time.

### Condition scoring 1-5

- 1 Too thin (very visible hipbones)
- 2 Thin (visible hipbones)
- 3 Medium (hipbones can be felt applying a light pressure with the hands)
- 4 Fat (hipbones can be felt applying some pressure with the hands)
- 5 Too fat (hipbones cannot be felt)

The ideal CS is 2.5 - 3; in order to achieve this we looked at the following points:

■ **Drinker flow rates**, which for lactating sows should be 2 l/min through nipple drinkers, and room temperature, which should be at around 16-18°C.

■ **Gestation** - Individual feeding of sows according to CS is ideal. If such a system is not possible, group sows into smalls, thins, fats etc. and set feed level accordingly.

This also reduces aggression in the group and gives smaller/weaker sows a better change to get their fair share of feed.

Regularly ensure that feeders are allocating the right amount and adjust feed level to ensure that the sows maintain or regain body condition. Thinner sows (not gilts) can benefit from a higher feeding level post service.

■ **Farrowing house** - It is crucial to maintain as much condition as possible, adjusting feed levels to a standard daily scale.

Keep a record of sows which lost a lot of condition in the previous lactation, and size her litter to her milking ability.

Sows should be fed little and

often and feed can be top dressed eg with oil, for problem/young sows which have a lower appetite, consult your nutritionist for advice.

Poor body condition is detrimental to sow performance. Both thin and fat sows have an increased risk of developing shoulder sores.

Fat sows are more likely to experience problems at farrowing, with high numbers of still births.

Sows that lose a high percentage of their body weight during lactation can have problems in regaining it and getting back in pig,



● Author Lis Ravn condition scoring a sow

these sows may have to be left for an extra cycle to recover, increasing empty days, or be culled in prime parity - all adding to the cost of production.

I advised the manager to discuss sow condition further with his nutritionist and to check the diet specifications; a work instruction from BPEX on sow condition scoring will soon be available. I'll check how he's getting on later in the year and see if the sow condition has improved.

## Nitrate rules are getting tighter - but don't panic!

From 1st January 2009 a 14% increase in the designated nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZ) will come into force.

If you border an existing zone and/or think you will fall into an NVZ following this increase, then you must check the NVZ maps at <http://web.adas.co.uk/defra/> to see the new zones.

The new rules become more prescriptive and procedural and although the Environment Agency inspection rate is 1% of holdings, compliance is mandatory.

Cross compliance and Environmental Permitting Regulation (IPPC) inspections may unearth any shortcomings.

Implementation of some elements can be phased in but after 1st January 2012 all farms with land in NVZs must be fully compliant.

Fear not though as help is at hand!

from Nigel Penlington

BPEX  
Environmental Expert



Meetings, workshops and advice are being made freely available from a number of organisations.

'Momenta' will be one of the key deliverers, alongside BPEX and the NPA, whose websites will contain details of meetings and workshops as they are announced.

The new rules will mean investment in both capital equipment and personal skills by farmers is required.

In response, Defra has published a series of

handbooks, each covering specific elements of the rules.

Keep copies readily available in the office as they are valuable reference material.

The six month slurry storage rule will be a problem for many; the volume of slurry has to be calculated using a set procedure, see Defra handbook 4 for details.

If you are short of storage:

■ Has all roof and clean surface water been separated? Slurry separation may remove 10-15% of slurry.

■ Can wash water be kept separate if safe year round spreading is available? Consider sluicing pits to the slurry store before washing.

Look out for regional meetings for further explanation and check the Defra website to download copies of the new handbooks.

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