

GUIDELINES FOR SPLIT SUCKLING

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Breeding companies have been selecting for born alive, which has led to increased litter sizes on farms. This has also resulted in a greater number of low birthweight piglets that require attention in order to thrive. The sow's ability to rear >15 piglets is limited. While producers may have been selecting for 16 teats, it is likely that not all teats are productive. Hence, the increased need for practices such as split suckling, cross-fostering and nurse sows nowadays. This is the first article in a 2-part series. Split suckling will be discussed in this article, with cross-fostering and the use of nurse sows discussed in the second article.

Split suckling is generally used to maximise colostrum intake in piglets. Split suckling can also be used to minimise mortality and help maximise young piglet viability and growth. This document lays out guidelines that may be helpful for farm staff carrying out split suckling.

Moving young piglets has a significant impact on antioxidant capacity, immune function and growth. Inform Nutrition manufacture Piglet Booster which is a supplement designed to support vitality, immunity, gut health and growth. When piglets are being split suckled, Piglet Booster is an ideal supplement to provide vitamins, trace elements, antioxidants and other nutrients. Piglet Booster supports the piglet's immune system, encourages colostrum intake and minimises the effects of stress during moving and split suckling.

Split suckling:

Split suckling is generally used to ensure that an adequate volume of colostrum intake per piglet is achieved. This is particularly important for piglets in large litters or low birthweight piglets. Split suckling reduces competition for colostrum by allowing piglets access to the sow in two groups.

Split suckling can be used:

- Where cross-fostering options are limited, e.g. the first few sows to farrow big litters in the group.
- With large litters.
- Where there is variation in piglet birthweight in the same litter e.g. small piglets and big piglets.

Guidelines for split suckling:

- Ensure the sow has a sufficient number of functioning teats.
- Split the litter into 2 groups: large and small piglets.
- Mark one group so they are clearly distinguished from the other e.g. with marking spray.
- Box up the heavier piglets first, allowing the weaker piglets first access to the sow.
- Give the small piglets 60 – 90 minutes on the sow.
- Put a reminder on your phone to swap piglet groups.
- Swap groups, allowing bigger piglets access to the sow.
- Allow all piglets to mix between feeding bouts.
- Carry out as necessary, at least twice per day, generally for the first ~2 days of life.

Ensure boxed up piglets do not get too warm. This is particularly important if your box has a lid. Equally, ensure they are not too cold by providing a lamp, heat pad or lid on the box if required. Don't take piglets off the sow while she is still farrowing.

Summary:

In summary, split suckling is a useful practice to maximise colostrum intake, health, immunity and growth of piglets, while at the same time, minimising mortality. Good attention to detail is required to ensure success.



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MEET THE TEAM

At Inform Nutrition we believe that our in-house team of nutrition, veterinary, manufacturing and quality experts are at the core of our success. Our company ethos has always been a collaborative process between our professionals and our customers. We recognise that working together we can make the best premix and feed additive products in the world.



Martin Beirne – Founder and Technical Director

Inform Nutrition was founded in 1986, by friends Denis Twomey and Martin Beirne, who saw a growing need for high quality customised feed supplements for the Irish farming market. Since then, under the technical direction of Martin the company has grown to be one of the largest premix plants in the country. With his career spanning UK, USA and Irish agriculture and qualifications in applied biochemistry and animal nutrition, Martin's unique approach to nutrition-based health drives innovation and continuous improvement at the core of Inform Nutrition.



Des Cronin – Head of Animal Health and Nutrition

With over 30 years experience in the animal feed industry, Des Cronin provides technical and nutritional support to our Irish and export customers across pig, ruminant, equine and small animal species. Des is also highly involved in the Inform Nutrition Innovation, Research and Development programmes, heading up several NPD project teams for Inform Nutrition's pig nutritional innovation projects.

Contact: des@informnutrition.com | 087 8115117



Dr. Fiona O'Meara – Specialist Pig Nutritionist

Fiona undertook her PhD under the supervision of Dr. Peadar Lawlor (Pig Development Department, Teagasc Moorepark), Dr. Gillian Gardiner (WIT) and Prof. John O' Doherty (UCD). Fiona gained invaluable practical on-farm experience while researching the microbiological quality of liquid feed on commercial pig units, whole diet and cereal fermentations, feed form and delivery methods for grow-finisher pigs, water-to-feed ratios and benzoic acid supplementation for grow-finisher pigs.

Contact: fiona@informnutrition.com | 086 0349331



P.J. Rea – Consultant

Since completing a Masters Degree in Ag Science from UCD in 1986, PJ has worked in the Premix industry in Ireland. Much of his 30 years' experience has been with Inform Nutrition and as a consultant since 2016. PJ specialises in nutritional support for the pig industry with particular emphasis on the pig feed home-mixer sector.



Inform Nutrition Ireland, Whites Cross, T23 KD50, Co. Cork, Ireland.
Tel: +353 (0)21 439 4770 | www.informnutrition.com

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