Rearing orphan piglets

A. W. Williams
REARING ORPHAN PIGLETS

By A. W. WILLIAMS, B.V.Sc., Government Veterinary Surgeon

When a newly-farrowed sow succumbs to accident or disease, or is unable to produce sufficient milk for the litter, the pig-raiser may be faced with the problem of hand-feeding the young pigs. If it is possible for the piglets to obtain colostrum (often known as “first milk” or “beastings”) during their first two days of life, their chance of survival will be increased and they may be reared successfully on cow’s milk.

If two or more sows farrow at approximately the same time, the orphan piglets may be placed with a foster-mother for two days to ensure that they receive colostrum.

Where this is not possible, a substitute for colostrum may be prepared by whisking a raw egg into each quart of cow’s milk (whole). This mixture should be fed for at least a week.

FEEDING

Scrupulous cleanliness should be observed in feeding baby pigs. The utensils should be scalded thoroughly before and after use and for this reason only sound enamel, glass, or glazed earthenware dishes should be used.

The milk should be fed at body temperature and should not be diluted. If shallow dishes are used, the pigs soon learn to drink if their noses are pushed gently into the milk. Apropos of this, it will be found that “up-ending” the young pigs and dipping their noses into the milk is a surprisingly efficient method of teaching them to drink.

“Little and often” is the best motto for feeding. Overfeeding especially during the first week of life leads to digestive troubles, and the recommended routine is to give five or six small feeds daily for the first fortnight after which the frequency can be reduced to three feeds a day.

Vitamin supplements such as Vetemul, and antibiotics such as Terramycin should be added to the milk in accordance with the manufacturers’ instructions. The antibiotic supplements are particularly desirable, not only to assist in growth development but to combat infections such as virus pneumonia.

Some farmers add sugar at the rate of two tablespoonfuls to each quart of milk. This may be helpful in preventing the so-called “baby pig disease” which is considered to be due to a drop in blood sugar levels. Any changes in the composition of the food should be made very gradually.

WARMTH IS ESSENTIAL

Baby pigs should be kept warm, preferably in a box with ample dry bedding. Draughts and chills must be avoided and some form of artificial heating is advisable if the night temperatures are liable to drop sharply.

A disused poultry hover, or a suitably-protected hot-water bottle or hot brick will help to maintain night temperatures at a safe level.

MILK SUBSTITUTE

Where adequate supplies of cow’s milk are not available, dried buttermilk may be substituted. One pound mixed with a gallon of water will give a fluid which can be used to replace whole milk.

Some form of solid feeding should commence when the piglets are about two weeks old.

A dry mash containing four parts of cracked grain and one part meatmeal should be made available in a separate trough from the milk. The pigs should
also have access to a trough of clean water. Green grazing is very desirable at all times.

The cracked grain should be increased at the rate of \( \frac{1}{4} \) lb. per week per pig so that at weaning age (8 weeks) the pigs should be receiving \( 1\frac{1}{2} \) lb. grain per day.

The milk supply is gradually decreased after three weeks so that after weaning the pigs can start straight on to dry mash and water. With the decrease in milk the vitamin and antibiotic supplements can be added to the mash.

It may be advisable to incorporate a mineral mixture into the mash after the piglets have been consuming it for some days. A suitable mixture would be four parts limestone to one part salt. About 1 oz. should be available for each pig.

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