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Breeding pigs for best use of skim milk

PIG production in conjunction with dairy farming in the South-West can be an efficient and profitable way of using surplus skim milk.

Here are some points in planning the breeding programme for the best use of surplus skim milk:

1. Mate the sows so the progeny of the first litters will be six to eight weeks old when the dairy herd starts calving. At this stage the pigs can cope with the initial flow of skim milk.

2. Mate the sows again on the first “heat” after weaning the first litter. This will allow the greatest possible use to be made of the last three to four months of milk production.

3. During the four months after the second matings the increase in skim milk production will be paralleled by the increase in growth and appetite of the first litters. It will also provide for the needs of the in-pig sows.

4. By the time the second batch of litters is farrowed, pigs from the first litters will be ready for market. These should then be sold to make enough milk available for the sows with litters at foot.

5. The second litters will then have the benefit of about three to four months of milk production. This will carry them through to heavy porkers. They can be fed to bacon weight if cereal and meatmeal are added to their diet.

In this programme some periods of dry feeding are necessary. When these occur, the maximum use of home-grown feedstuffs should be made. Feeds such as cull potatoes, waste fruit, root crops, fodder crops and green pasture will reduce the quantities of purchased feeds.

The First Litters

Sows with their first litters of the season at foot when there is no skim milk should have a daily ration of 3 lb. of crushed grain and 1½ lb. of meatmeal with home-grown feedstuffs to appetite. If home-grown feeds are in short supply, the cereal/meatmeal ration must be increased. This may necessitate up to 10 lb. of crushed grain and 2 lb. of meatmeal being fed daily. The cost of this would be about £11 for each sow for the eight weeks to weaning.

Creep feeding a litter of seven pigs from three to eight weeks of age with a cereal/meatmeal ration costs just over £4. The total cost is then about £15, or £2 3s. a head, and includes the cost of feeding the sow.

So that there is no check in growth, 1 lb. of crushed grain as well as the daily quota of skim milk should be fed for two weeks after weaning. This will add about 5s. a head to the cost. After the pigs are 10 weeks old the grain ration can be discontinued.

At the beginning of the season pig prices are abnormally high because of heavy demands. The breeding and rearing of the first litter of pigs at about £2 8s. each would usually be cheaper than buying slips and weaners in saleyards.
The Second Litters

Skim milk is abundant when the second litter is born and extra feeding is not needed for the sow if there is plenty of grass and perhaps other home-grown feedstuffs. However it is wise to creep feed the litter with a cereal meal from three to eight weeks and up to 10 weeks if possible. This gives a balance to the protein rich milk diet. From then until market, skim milk, green pasture and other home-grown feeds will ensure a satisfactory growth rate.

IN BRIEF

• Mate sows so that the first litters will be six to eight weeks old when milk production starts in the dairy herd.
• Mate the sows again on the first "heat" after weaning the first litter.
• Market pigs from the first litters straight after the second litters are born.
• Market pigs from the second litters either at the end of the skim milk season or feed them through to heavier weights on a cereal/meat-meal diet.

In practise this programme is quite simple and it makes the best use of a short period supply of valuable pig feed.

CEREALS IN PIG RATIONS

Cereal grains are low in calcium and unless pigs are given skim milk, which is a good source of calcium, 1 lb. of ground limestone should be added to each 100 lb. of grain. This mixture should also contain ½ lb. of common salt unless the water supply has a salt content above 100 grains per gallon. A shortage of salt in the diet of pigs can result in a poor conversion rate of feed into meat.

Oats are frequently overfed to young pigs. Because oats have a high fibre content this can cause scouring, and the growth rate suffers. The maximum oats allowable in a ration for pigs up to 100 lb. liveweight should be 30 per cent. of the ration. Breeding sows and heavy baconers may benefit from a higher proportion of oats because the greater fibre content in the diet may satisfy their appetites without contributing to over-fatness.