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Good Morning! I have been asked to speak to you about reducing pre-weaning mortality. This subject is of great interest to me because, on the average U.S. farm, 1 out of every 5 pigs does not survive his farrowing house experience. World class farms, however, function with a loss of 1 out of 20 pigs. Compounding this dilemma is the fact that this percentage is getting worse and not better. After practicing veterinary medicine for 32 years, I believe I now understand the reason why this parameter is out of compliance with desired goals. It is my opinion that the problem of piglet survivability is a problem with the mindset of the people in the following three groups:

1. The owners
2. The caretakers
3. The veterinarian

All the individuals in these three groups need to refocus on the basic principles for taking care of unborn and newborn piglets. Each piglet needs to be:

1. Born unstressed
2. Insured adequate colostrum intake
3. Put in a good family
4. Provided a world class comfort zone

The principles for achieving these four basic needs are established and available for caretakers. However, because of a paralysis caused by blame shifting, these fundamental principles are not being adequately carried out. Therefore, the solution to reducing high pre-weaning mortality is persuading the people in the three core groups to aggressively provide these four basic piglet needs for each and every pig. However, there is another key point I want to make today. That is the fact that most people, including myself, rarely change our behavior because of logical arguments. I believe there is a much better form of persuasion. It is not a discussion of research data, but, rather, a word picture or story that is emotionally motivating. People are most likely to change their behavior when impacted emotionally. This approach stands in stark contrast to the use of scientific data. Over the course of my career, I have accumulated a series of word pictures and stories that I use to emotionally engage individuals to accomplish basic piglet care. A few examples are:

1. Pigs born unstressed

Problem – Owner fails to provide the leadership necessary to instigate 24/7 care during farrowing.

Word picture – How would you feel if you built a million dollar factory with machines to manufacture widgets but the government only allowed you to staff the machines 7-8 hours a day?

Problem - Staff fails to attend each birth.

Word picture – Your child is being born, the doctor and/or nurses are not present because the time is inconvenient for them. How do you feel?

2. Pigs insured adequate colostrum intake

Problem - Staff fails to make sure the last or weak pig get adequate colostrum.

Word picture – Food at the school cafeteria is limited and offered on a first come, first serve basis. How would you feel if your child lingered to ask the teacher a question which caused him to arrive last at the cafeteria?

3. Pigs put in a good family

Problem – Some pigs have all the best teats.

Word picture – How would you feel if you were the youngest child and your older siblings usually ate most of the food on the table leaving you hungry each night?

4. Pigs provided a world class comfort zone

Problem – Pigs are sleeping on a crowded, perforated, cold, and dangerous surface.

Word picture – How would you feel if, on a chilly night, you had to sleep in a motel room in the dangerous part of town on a thin, worn out mattress with no covers?
Larry Coleman

I understand that this message may seem elementary, but I challenge you to look at the status of pre-weaning mortality on the average farm. Then consider the possibility that veterinarians have taken a wrong turn and provided only scientific data to caretakers and failed to achieve staff “buy-in” to their recommendations. I would suggest we refocus on the basic needs of the piglet and how we can persuade the owners and caretakers to provide these for each and every piglet.