Using word pictures to reduce pre-weaning mortality

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Good morning, it is an honor to be asked to address you at this conference. It, likewise, is an honor to be teaming up with Dr. Coleman on this subject. If I could, I would like to piggy-back off of Dr. Coleman’s “4 Needs of Focus” and explain how we get this done at our facilities.

1. Pigs born unstressed

We are a 5500 sow operation. We overlap our schedules to make sure sows farrowing are monitored 24/7. All sows are checked on with a card to record issues. The person attending farrowing does only that; we do not add jobs to keep him busy. He assists farrowing; towel dries all piglets, checks for fever, walks sows, and counts functional teats.

2. Colostrum intake

If you want to know which pigs will survive and go on to thrive, they are the ones started on the teat and get sufficient colostrum ingestion. Small pigs and/or pigs stressed from the birthing process may need extra colostrum. We milk colostrum off of sows that are oozing out milk due to contractions and give it to the needy pigs. Once pigs get started on the teat, they rarely stop. We also split-suckle all litters before they are 24 hours old. This is done by taking full belly pigs and putting them in a hot box for an hour while others have a chance to nurse.

3. Pigs put in a good family

We do what we call the “selection process,” and move the smallest pigs as sows are farrowing. The rest are sized up evenly after the farrowing event is finished. Functional teats are noted on the card and we load up sows to keep mammary production high.

4. Provide a world class comfort zone

We run a double mat system for baby pig comfort. We put a rubber mat above the wire flooring and use Mistral (drying agent) to keep the area dry. Also, we have a plastic mat under the wire which is permanent. The rubber mat will be moved in 3 to 7 days depending on the season and temperature.

Finally, we tell our people both how and why we do things. How, teaches the process or routine. Why, keeps the process in place and keeps changes within parameters.