

Pork labelled 'Code 1' is from pigs that had access to the outdoors.

the Green party wants to see 30 per cent more pen space per hog.

Pork is already following eggs this year with the introduction of a European label code giving country of slaughter and rearing and feeding location. Despite yearlong pressure from national consumer organisations, the European Union still refuses to make country of origin (i.e. location of birth) mandatory on meat labelling. However, programs to protect national pork production in

some countries, notably Britain, have resulted in some retail outlets agreeing to country of origin on labels.

The swine sector in Britain and meat retailers there also promote a range of production certification schemes, including the "Red Tractor" program with standards in some cases above the mandatory requirements. For instance, a Red Tractor rule prohibits castration for male hogs, a practice still allowed in most European countries

Tired of fostering? Try a cuppa!

Supplementary milk substitute in the farrowing pen is causing more interest in Europe. The trend means large litters no longer need to be split-up – with all the associated extra work of fostering.

There are now various cup systems for automatic metering of fresh-mixed milk substitute to piglets in farrowing pens and they are certainly not cheap. But intensive testing by agricultural institutes in Germany indicates the systems can offer solid extra profit at the end of the day.

Extra-large litters are becoming a big problem. For example, where University of Giessen scientists went to test a one cup system, they chose a 1,000-sow commercial unit with Danish DanAvl sows. Random selection of 132 sows for the experiment all produced 19 live piglets per birth, or more (average 19.4).

Normal farm routine would mean fostering and/or removal of batches to pens with mechanical milk substitute

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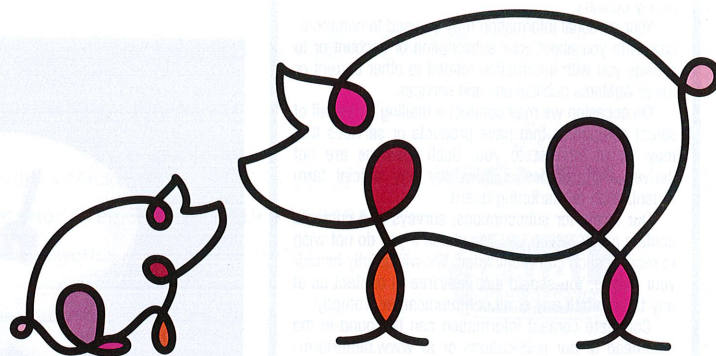
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feeding. The attraction of supplementary milk with a cup, or small trough system in the pen is that this should work with the large litter kept entire.

One point already established for the cup systems is that they help nursing sows, too. At the German Boxberg State Swine Breeding Institute (LSZ), researcher Stefanie Baumann found that sows lost an average 37.58 kilograms in bodyweight over a suckling period with no supplementary milk feeding system. Where extra milk was available to litters, sow weight loss under the same conditions (weighted for litter size) was 10 per cent less at 33.89 kilograms.

The LSZ work, carried out four years ago, also showed piglet losses to weaning with such a cup system were reduced by an average 1.82 per cent and that piglet weight at weaning was 0.23 kilograms more. This trial, however, showed no significant difference in post-weaning performance between control litters and those that had been offered supplementary milk during suckling.

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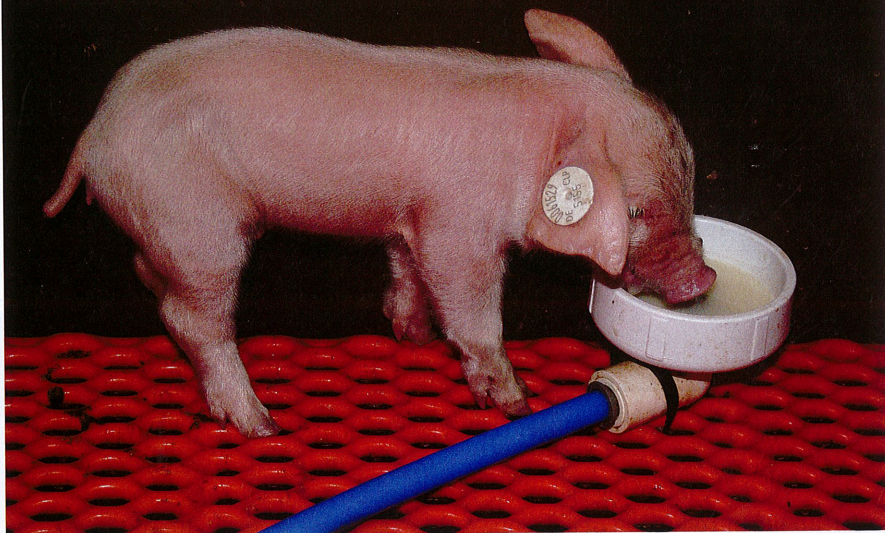
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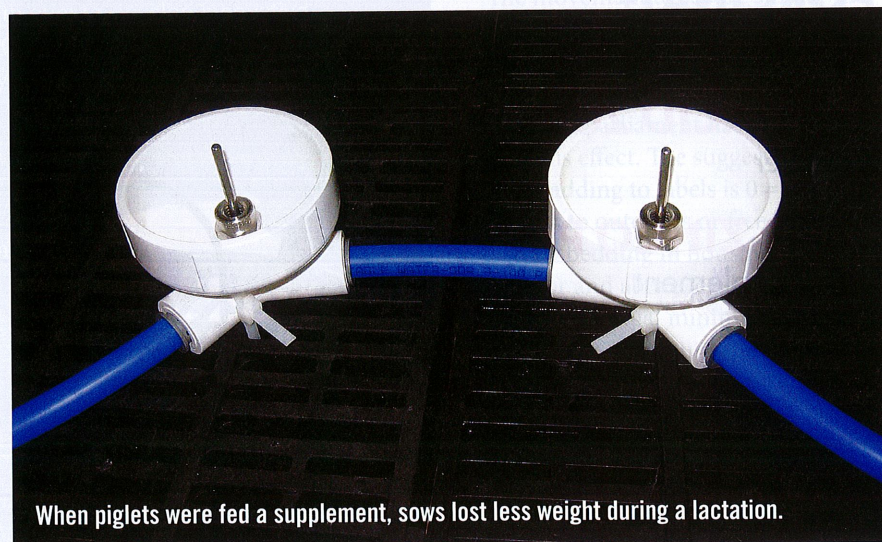
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Extra milk in the farrowing pen proves a real bonus for piglet performance in large litters without the extra work of fostering.



Research four years ago showed fewer piglets were lost when supplemented, but there was no difference in post weaning performance.



When piglets were fed a supplement, sows lost less weight during a lactation.

Photo: Supp-Le-Cup.

Advantages in litter growth and survival are more clearly defined in the Giessen University trial. The financial side was also looked into and the result was a definite economic advantage for the best performing herds.

The 132 sows selected were split into two groups. One had milk substitute offered to litters from day 2. Both groups were offered pre-starter rations from the second week, with weaning after four weeks. Litter weight at weaning averaged 84.1 kilograms for the milk supplement group and just 64.4 kilograms for the control. Some of the advantage won by the "milk cup" litters was due to far better survival figures. Losses to weaning averaged 15.4 per cent for the supplemented group and 22.5 per cent for the control litters, unusually high for this farm. Main cause of death in the latter: crushing.

If the cup system was to be used for all 1,000 sows on this farm and capital investment depreciated over 10 years, costs for extra labour, electricity (for mixing and pumping the milk substitute), and for the milk powder itself come out at about \$3.97 per piglet. However, this still leaves around €70,000 more profit from more piglets and heavier weaners. Breaking even for this system under German costs would mean that weaner numbers per litter would have to increase by 0.9. The farm helping the Giessen scientists with their trial managed an extra 1.9 weaners per litter.

A computer warning system for farrowing

University of Kiel scientists in Germany are completing a computerized early-warning system for farrowing, based on sow ear tags that record the animal's head movements. The latest versions of these tags also monitor sow temperature.

The background to this development is that sows generally become more agitated as birth approaches and, a few hours before farrowing begins, often add to general unrest by starting typical nest-making movements. Based on the movement patterns, the Kiel researchers have fine-tuned software so that the build-up in movements right up to farrowing time can be fairly accurately pre-

Electronic ear tags for sows record and transmit temperature and head movements, giving plenty of warning when the build-up to farrowing begins and helping predict the appearance of the first piglets. Associated software enables graphic presentation of each sow's personal movement pattern.

dicted and a suitable warning given to herd manager or farmer via computer or cell phone.

The software is flexible enough to permit a predetermined time lag for early warning, for instance four or eight hours before farrowing begins. There's even the opportunity for two-step alarms so that staff can plan even better to be present

at farrowing. All information from the ear tags (from MKW Electronics in this case) is sent direct to the herd computer via a router in the farrowing house. This enables graphic presentation of the movement patterns for individual sows so that the trends can be monitored over a matter of days, allowing plenty of time for management planning. **BP**

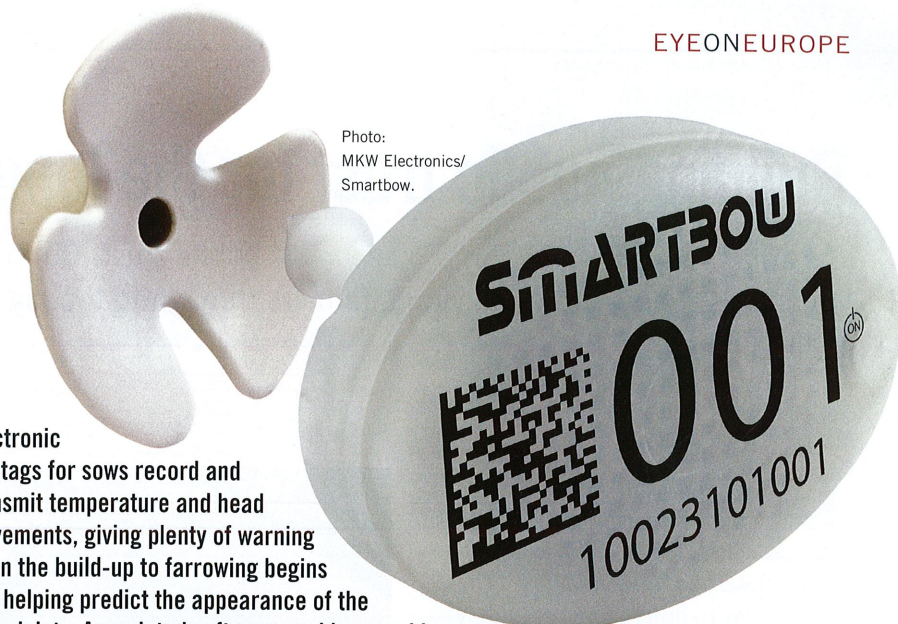
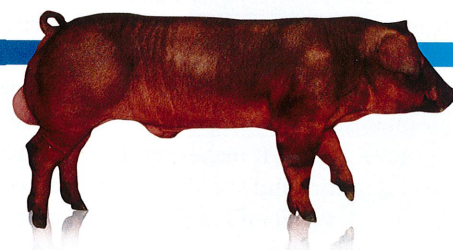


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