

**Edited by Ciarán Carroll
and Orla Kinane**



Welcome to the March edition of our monthly newsletter.

The financial crisis is continuing and leaves pig producers facing huge challenges. The Pig Development Department is focused on assisting producers review on farm costs, prepare cashflows and access finance to help navigate this extremely challenging period. Talk to your Advisor to develop a plan.

In this newsletter you will find recommendations for pig farmers to cope with the crisis, Michael McKeon takes a look at optimum sale weight in light of the current situation and Elisa Arnaud and Peadar Lawlor present results from the PigNutriStrat project on the effects of administering pain relief to sows after farrowing.

In the latest episode of the Pig Edge, you'll hear from a recent webinar on 'Financial Supports to Weather the Crisis'. Ciarán Carroll was joined by Gerard McCutcheon and Michael McKeon to discuss current costs and cash flows. Sean Farrell

spoke about SBCI Funding, and Dr. Anne Marie Butler spoke about preparing to meet the bank. Donal Whelton, Allied Irish Banks, and Pat Byrnes, Bank of Ireland, also joined the webinar with their thoughts and advice. Details on how to listen to this podcast can be found later in this newsletter.

The Irish Pig Health Society Symposium will take place in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise on Tuesday April 26th. You can find more information later in this newsletter.

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- Recommendations for pig farmers to cope with the crisis
- Administering pain relief to sows after farrowing

Is it time to lose weight?

Michael McKeon

As the backlog of finisher pigs on Irish pig units has now largely dissipated, it gives producers the opportunity to assess what is the optimum sale weight for their pig unit. Logic might dictate that the record high feed ingredient prices would automatically make reducing sale weights a 'no-brainer' however it is not as clear-cut as it may seem.

There are four principal reasons why producers may want to reduce sale weight below their norm of 2021. These reasons are:

1. Immediate cashflow injection
2. Reduce feed usage
3. Improve stocking rate
4. Improve financial efficiencies

The decision criteria for each of these will vary significantly from unit-to-unit and be primarily influenced by a unit's; current financial situation, feed conversion efficiency, non-feed costs, space allowance and volume of ingredients 'forward bought'. The scenarios below are based on a 600 sow unit selling 28 pigs/sow/yr.

1. Immediate Cashflow injection

In the current financial difficulties many pig operations urgently need a cash injection or bridging finance, until bank or other finance is secured. In this situation reducing sale weight is a critical necessity and therefore must be undertaken. The forward selling/liquidation of an extra two weeks of pig sales (120kgs – 110 kgs) would generate a cash injection for the business of ~ €55,000 at current pig price (€1.42).

2. Reduce feed usage

If the pig operator is a home-miller and has being lucky enough to forward purchase feed ingredients at an advantageous price – I won't say 'low price' as they don't exist! Reducing sale weights will reduce feed usage and therefore may help to 'ekked-out' the existing volume contracts. A 10kg sale weight reduction (120-to-110kgs) could

reduce barley usage by 5.7t/wk which over a 13 week period would equate to 74 tons being 'ekked-out'. (646 less pigs * 2.8kgs * 7days, barley at 45% finisher inclusion rate).

3. Improve space allowance

In general, sow conception/fecundity has improved over the last few years due to better vaccination programs and genetic advancement. Some units may now have a stocking rate above the optimal level which may be adversely reducing growth rates etc. A two week reduction in sale weights (120-100kgs) could in theory improve space allowance for the remaining finisher pigs by 10-15%.

4. Improve financial efficiencies

Reducing sale weights can improve financial efficiencies in certain circumstances. If contract finisher units are being rented to house a small percentage of the total finisher stock, then it may be prudent to reduce sale weight and cancel the rental agreement. Alternatively, if the pig unit has considerable health issues with resultant high mortality / poor FCE then reducing weights may be of benefit.

In general, if a pig unit has average FCE and average non-feed costs, then reducing the sale weight will not improve financial efficiencies unless the non-feed cost can also be reduced significantly. The Teagasc Pig Department has produced an 'Optimum Sale Wt' calculator and the table below illustrates the effect on total cost of production as sale weight falls. Even though there is an improved FCE within the lower sale weights (accounted-for within the calculation), the lower sale weights INCREASE the cost of production and therefore reduces financial efficiency on a c/kg basis.

Contact your Teagasc Specialist Adviser for more information on the 'Optimum Sale Wt Calculator'

Ave sale wt / pig - liveweight	128*	122	115	109	102
Total Feed Cost €/pig	€157.59	€148.29	€139.58	€131.10	€122.85
Total Feed Cost c/kg	160.8	159.4	158.6	157.9	157.5
Non-feed cost total/month	€70,655	€70,655	€70,655	€70,655	€70,655
Non-feed cost c/kg	47.3	49.9	52.7	55.9	59.5
Total Cost c/ kg	208.1	209.3	211.3	213.8	217.0
Saving per kg c/kg - (versus 128kgs)	-	-1.2	-3.2	-5.7	-8.8
Saving Per pig - (versus 128kgs)	-	-€1.16	-€2.96	-€5.01	-€7.32
Saving Per month - (versus 128kgs)	-	-€1,768	-€4,506	-€7,633	-€11,158

* Due to risk of boar taint Teagasc does not recommend slaughtering at 128 kgs

Recommendations for pig farmers to cope with the crisis

1. Financial projections.

Farmers should have up-to-date accurate cash flows and economic figures and use those for decision making between different options. Most of the decisions taken now are going to have an impact on your farm profitability for the coming 12 months at least. What is viable in one farm may not be advisable in another one so look for tailored advice. Talk to your advisor if you need assistance with the projections.

2. Voluntary Destocking/Restocking.

This includes a reduction in the number of served sows or a partial or full depopulation with the objective of reducing losses for a period of time. Farmers need to consider the economic impact and the availability of replacement animals. This option is recommended for farms with low health status that would improve productive performance and reduce AMU when destocking. Use the Teagasc and AHI national figures to benchmark your farm and determine if this is an option for you. Your advisor can help with the cash flows in each scenario and work with your veterinarian to recommend the best option.

3. Feed formulation and sale weight.

Review the formulation of your diets to make sure you are using the most efficient diet from an economic point of view. Mills will normally be doing this for you. For those home milling try to explore 2-3 scenarios for different

ingredient costs. Regarding the option to reduce sale weights, each farm should be looked at on an individual basis. A reduction on sale weight may reduce costs given a certain feed cost and pork price but this needs to be calculated on a farm basis considering fix costs. Farmers may need to consider additional actions to cut fixed costs.

4. Preserve animal welfare.

Farmers need to anticipate any issues affecting animal welfare. Contact your veterinarian and advisor as soon as possible for recommendation on this area. Anticipation of situations like forced destocking for closure will allow for a structured solution to minimise the losses for the farmer and to maintain high animal welfare. These issues can also affect the pig sector beyond an individual farm.

5. Talk to your advisor.

Teagasc has a coordinated crisis response group for the different farming sectors and it is following the daily changes at an international level. Stay in contact with your advisor to get information on what other stakeholders are doing and what is happening at a national and international level in the pig and other sectors. Do not isolate yourself because this can have economic and, more importantly, psychological consequences. Contact your advisor to get real time market intelligence and, if required, to get help for your mental wellbeing.

Administering pain relief to sows after farrowing increased piglet weaning weight and reduced the need for medicinal treatment of suckling piglets

Elisa Arnaud & Peadar Lawlor

We are all very conscious that litter size in sows has increased dramatically in the past decade. This brings with it serious challenges for the producer. For instance colostrum yield per sow has not increased and we must ensure that each pig gets sufficient colostrum intake from the limited pool of colostrum available. We believe that ensuring adequate colostrum intake to all pigs will help increase pre-weaning growth but will also reduce the need to treat suckling pigs with anti-inflammatories and antibiotics.

As part of the PigNutriStrat project, we recently looked at 2 strategies to ensure all pigs in the litter received sufficient colostrum intake. The first was split suckling which in our case consisted of

removing the 6 heaviest piglets from the sow for 1 hr to allow the lightest piglets suckle, at 4 hrs after onset of parturition. We repeated this process again 1.5 hrs later. The second strategy involved administering Meloxicam (Loxicom® Injection, Norbrook, Ireland) to sows as soon as possible after the placenta was delivered. The idea here was that administration of pain relief to the sow would facilitate greater suckling by the pigs.

We obtained some very interesting results from the experiment. Split suckling had no effect on piglet intake of colostrum, however, administering pain relief to the sows increased colostrum intake per pig by ~18g (Figure 1).

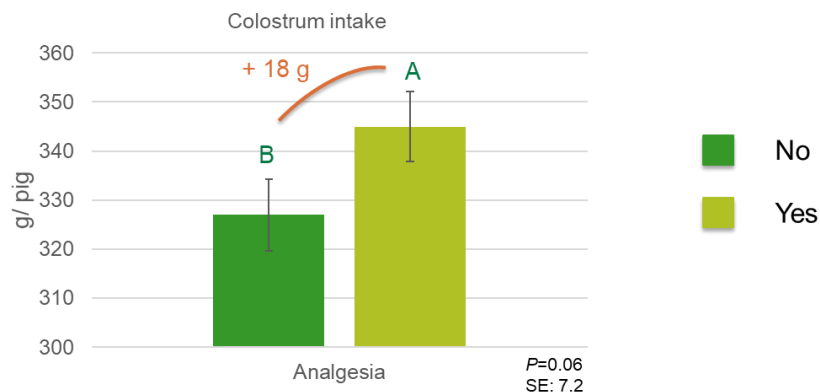


Figure 1. Effect of analgesia (pain relief) on average colostrum intake

This increase in colostrum intake at first glance does not look to be a major effect. However, it was sufficient to lead on to an increase in average piglet weaning weight of 350g when pigs were

weaned at ~26 days (Figure 2). Of equal importance, split suckling, at least as we conducted it, actually reduced average piglet weaning weight by 190g.

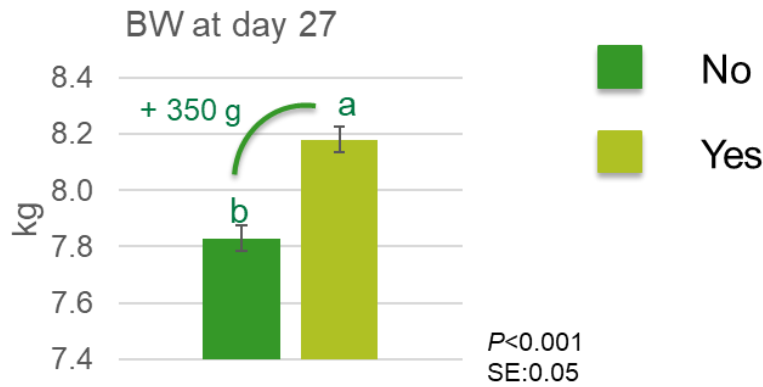


Figure 2. Effect of analgesia (pain relief) in sows on average piglet weaning weight

We also looked at the number of clinical cases identified per litter during the trial and found that this was reduced by ~65% when sows had been administered with pain relief. This significantly reduced the need to treat suckling piglets with both anti-inflammatories and antibiotics (Figure 3). The quantity of antibiotics administered per

piglet was reduced by ~50% while that of anti-inflammatories was reduced by ~55%. On the other hand, split suckling had little or no effect on clinical case number per litter or the volume of injectable medicines administered.

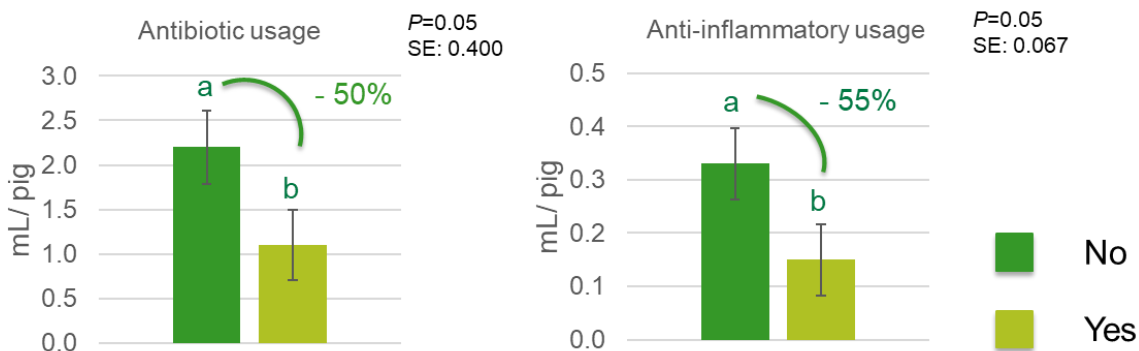


Figure 3. Effect of pain relief in sows on the volume of antibiotics and anti-inflammatories administered per piglet.

From this work we can conclude that administering pain relief to sows as soon after delivery of the placenta as possible, will increase colostrum intake and weaning weight in piglets. As important, it will also reduce the number of clinical cases of disease identified per litter thereby reducing the need to use injectable antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. Split suckling on the other hand reduced piglet weaning weight and is

unlikely to reduce the need for medicinal usage in suckling pigs.

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Irish Pig Health Society Symposium

2022 IPHS SYMPOSIUM



The Irish Pig Health Society (IPHS) 2022 Symposium and trade show will take place in person in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise on Tuesday April 26th. The IPHS are very pleased to host a tremendous line up of Irish and international experts, as well as experienced pig producers. Speakers will present practical solutions to current challenges of health, welfare, and productivity in the pig farming sector.

Topics and Speakers:

- New Feed Ingredients
Professor Ilias Kyriazakis
- Feed ingredients market update
Dr. Rory Deverell
- Making the most of the Pig HealthCheck Programme
Dr. Carla Gomes
- How technology can improve your farm
Charlie Thompson
- What is coming down the line – free farrowing
Dr. Emma Baxter
- Learnings from the current crisis
Pig producer panel

[Full details of the event here.](#)

The Pig Edge Podcast



On the latest episode of The Pig Edge podcast you'll hear from a recent webinar on 'Financial Supports to Weather the Crisis' [listen here](#).

In the podcast Michael McKeon talks about the Current Cost Reckoner which you can [download here](#).

Postgraduate Student Series



In a recent video series postgraduate students in the Pig Development Department spoke about their research projects. The videos are available to [watch here](#).



For more information visit our website
www.teagasc.ie/animals/pigs

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