

# MIRACLE OF BIRTH CENTER

## COMMON QUESTIONS-DISCUSSION TOPICS

### **SWINE TOPICS**

What is the length of gestation in a sow?

114 days—or three months, three weeks, and three days

### **Why are the sows in a farrowing pen or stall?**

The stalls allow us to control the environment for both the mother and her pigs. The baby pigs need a very warm environment when they are born (notice the heat lamps or warming pads) but this warm temperature would be very uncomfortable for the sow. The water drip system over the head of the sow allows us to keep the sow cool while the piglets stay warm.

The stalls allow the piglets to move about without getting crushed when the sow lies down. The most common cause of baby pig mortality is chilling or crushing. If the sows farrow in a conventional pen, many pigs die from crushing when they get trapped between the wall and the sow when she lies down.

The stalls are designed to give the piglets access to the sow's udder. The baby pigs will nurse about every twenty minutes to half hour. You might even hear the sow grunt and call her pigs when she feels full of milk.

Finally, the stalls keep a very clean environment for the babies. The flooring is designed so that manure and urine will drop to the shallow pit below. This minimizes the chances of scours (diarrhea), which is the most common infectious disease of baby pigs.

### **But the sow can't turn around.**

These sows have been bred to thrive in a confined space. You will notice that they seem content. They are provided with feed, water, and a comfortable environment.

### **What about gestation stalls?**

Pork producers rely on veterinarians and science to guide their decision as to how best raise their pigs in a humane manner. The AVMA has reviewed the science and has found that both group housing and stalls can provide humane housing for sows. Sows in individual stalls can be given individualized care and do not have the social stress associated with competition and fighting that can happen in group pens.

### **Why are the piglets' tails sometimes cut off?**

The first day after the pigs are born, they are given an injection of iron (they are born anemic and get little iron from milk), the needle teeth are sometimes cut (to prevent injuries to one another when they are playing and fighting, and to prevent small cuts to the sow's udder), and the tails may be cut. If the tails are left long, there is a tendency for them to chew on each other's tails and cause spinal cord infections.

### **When do the piglets start to nurse?**

As soon as the piglet is born its first instinct is to find the udder and nurse. The farrowing pen is designed to allow the pig to accomplish this important task easily. The first milk is called colostrum. It is rich in antibodies to protect the baby pig from infection early in life and it contains important energy and protein to get the piglet off to a good start.

### **How many pigs does each sow have?**

A sow can have as many as twenty pigs in a litter, but an ideal litter size is 12 to 14. If she has more than that, the piglets are often very small and she may not have enough teats for them to nurse adequately. Piglets also can be “cross-fostered”, that is, moved to a sow with a smaller litter if she delivered the same day.

These little pigs will reach market weight (around 270 pounds) in about six months.

### **What happens to the runts?**

Many small or undersized pigs may die if they become weak and cannot get adequate milk. As you see, they have to scramble and compete for their dinner. This type of farrowing stall gives small piglets the best chance for survival.