

The Van Dijck family lays a good foundation for the rapid growth of piglets at the sow farm

This is a translation of a Dutch article. Originally written in Dutch by John Lamers, and published on Varkens.nl on 20 April 2022.

Find the original article in Dutch here:

<https://www.varkens.nl/nieuws/2022/04/20/familie-van-dijck-legt-goede-basis-voor-vlot-doorgroeien-van-biggen>



Photo: Ron Magielse

Excellent hygiene, a diet that fits the needs of the DanBred sows, correct consultation policy, and supplementary feeding tailored to the Duroc piglets. With *this* foundation, Maarten Van Dijck and Liesje Van Dijck-Paepen ensure that the piglets get off to a good start. And now, the continued growth after weaning goes smoothly.



Good, continued growth of the piglets after weaning is essential to ensure that they can perform well as finisher pigs. The objective of the Flemish pig farmer, Maarten Van Dijck, is that at least three rounds can be run on his farm. That is one of the reasons why he chose the DanBred sow and Duroc terminal sire. High growth is achievable with this combination, which is necessary because the sows are able to wean many piglets.

To ensure that the piglets continue the growth after weaning, Van Dijck and Van Dijck-Paepen – together with the managers, Koen van Mechelen and Jos Roelen, and the other employees – are constantly working on ways to improve.

For example, since the expansion two years ago, they switched to their own DanBred sow breeding programme. This has further improved the high health status of the farm, and with it, the production of the sows.

NEW FEED SUPPLIER

The switch to De Heus Voeders as feed supplier was also important. De Heus tailors the feed specifically to the needs of DanBred sows and Duroc piglets.

“We only supply premium feeds made from purified grains, so that there are no contaminants or mycotoxins in the feed,” says advisor Ludo Beerten of De Heus. “With the help of the Matrix roller technology, we can fine-tune the fibre fraction to the needs of the DanBred sows and ensure that intestinal health remains in order.”

INTESTINAL HEALTH POINT OF ATTENTION

Intestinal health is also a point of attention for the weaned DanBred x Duroc piglets. “If they do not get off to a good start after weaning due to intestinal problems, it will take too long for them to grow properly,” says Roelen: “When we started at the second location in Meerselredreef, we regularly had E. coli problems among the weaned piglets. Then you need medicine, growth lags behind, and uniformity decreases. You will not achieve the desired growth in the finisher pigs, and you cannot empty a unit in two batches.”

In-house breeding as well as feeding the sows correctly have already helped to better prepare the piglets for weaning. The birth weights of the piglets have increased by almost 150 g to an average of 1,350 g. The number of liveborn piglets has risen to 18.3. Due to the higher birth weights, the piglets drink their colostrum better, which is necessary for a good start.



Jos Roelen regularly takes a liquid feed sample for inspection. Photo: Ron Magielse.

And it does not stop there. According to Van Mechelen, it is important that the sows do not farrow too early: “We aim for 116-117 days of gestation. Then the piglets will have grown well and will be more vital.”

It is also important that the sows farrow smoothly. Therefore, they receive food three times a day in the farrowing unit, so they continue to eat well: “As a result, I can quickly increase the feed dose after farrowing,” says Van Mechelen, and continues: “I don't have a fixed schedule for that. I pay close attention to how the sows are doing and whether they take their food and water well. If there is something left in the tank, I do not increase the feed amount. If they eat well, then I gradually increase the feed amount until they take in 7.5 to 8 kg of feed at the end of the lactation period.”

INGEST COLOSTRUM WELL FIRST

After the piglets have properly ingested colostrum, Van Mechelen and Van Dijck-Paepen determine which piglets to submit together. The gilts are inseminated a little earlier, so that they give birth a day or two earlier than the older sows. This gives the piglets extra time to ingest colostrum. The robust piglets that drink well are then placed with the gilts, so that all the gilt's teats provide a good supply of milk.

2nd and 3rd litter sows are the ideal foster sows for the surplus piglets, as they produce the most milk. “But we don't have a fixed schedule for this either,” says Van Dijck-Paepen: “Sometimes, we put 40 piglets with two sows and then give them extra feed in addition to the Nutrix. It can turn out slightly different every round.”

Because of the large litters, and to ensure a good start of intestinal health, additional feeding of the piglets in the farrowing pen is necessary. This is done with the Nutrix system that can feed milk and porridge. The supplementary feed also comes from De Heus and is tailored to the Duroc piglets.



Liesje van Dijck and Koen van Mechelen choose the surplus piglets that go to the foster sow. Photo: Ron Magiels.

“The piglets receive Nurse Milk from day 2,” says Van Mechelen. “After that, we gradually, but quickly, switch to Nurse Meal on days 4-5, and on day 10, we gradually switch to Comfort. We feed this until just after weaning.”

At weaning, the smallest piglets remain on the sow farm for a while. They go to a special, well-heated nursery with a creep for the piglets and are pampered with extra Comfort 2. The majority of the piglets leave for the second location in Meerle. There they are given Comfort 2 for another day, but then Roelen gradually switches to Comfort 3D: a special feed for piglets with Duroc as father. From day 7, the manager slowly switches to Comfort 4D. “They get that until they weigh about 15 kilos. Then the growth gets going,” he says.

In addition to the feed, a good climate is also necessary for the weaned piglets. To this end, the ventilation and heating have been adapted. The extraction was initially done from under the floor, but it had far too little capacity. The heater was placed against the back wall. In combination with the inlet valve in the ceiling, this resulted in unwanted air flows, which caused cold air to descend on the piglets. This was solved by moving the heating elements.

The adjustments are not without effect: “Health and performance have really improved. I no longer need to treat piglets for E. coli. That has really become an exception. The piglets start growing much better than before,” says Roelen.



RESULTS OF FINISHER PIGS HAVE ALSO IMPROVED

This good start will also have an effect on the finisher pigs in the near future: “They are already growing well at over 900 g per day and that will certainly exceed 950 g,” Roelen expects¹. The finisher pigs grow on liquid feed. This largely consists of circular products, such as their own 120 hectares of CCM, cheese whey, wheat starch and barley, spelt, and French fries that are not suitable for human consumption.



¹ *Editor's Note: In the Netherlands, daily gain is measured from 20 kg to slaughter.*