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TITLE

PRE-FARROWING SUPPLEMENT THROUGH DRINKING WATER REDUCES STILLBIRTH

Pieter Langendijk¹, Jac Bergman¹, Marleen Fleuren¹

¹ *Trouw Nutrition R&D*

CONTENT

Background and Objectives. The majority of stillborn piglets are potentially viable, but die due to asphyxia during birth. Data from our research centre have shown that oxygenation of piglets deteriorates and stillbirth rate increases with duration of parturition.

Material and Methods. In this study, multiparous sows (Hendrix Genetics, Netherlands, n=56) were allocated to receive either normal water, or to receive a supplement dosed through their drinking water from 5 days before the average due date, until they had finished farrowing. The supplement (patent pending) was designed to increase oxygen levels in the piglets at birth. Assistance during farrowing was restricted to a minimum (7% of sows). Sows were monitored continuously during farrowing, and piglets were weighed immediately at birth, and 24 h later to estimate colostrum intake. Total born was 15.7±0.6. Number of born alive was analysed using total born as a covariate, to provide comparison between treatments as if total born was equal.

Results. Water intake before farrowing (10 to 15 L/d) was not affected by the supplement. Number of piglets born alive was increased from 14.1±0.3 to 14.7±0.3 (P<0.05). Intake of colostrum was increased in piglets from sows that received the supplement (P<0.05). Numbers of piglets surviving after equalising the litters was increased by 0.4 for sows that received the supplement (not significant).

Discussion and Conclusions. A pre-farrowing supplement designed to overcome the underlying causes of stillbirth, increased the number of piglets born alive by 0.6 piglets in unassisted farrowings. Moreover, colostrum intake was increased, suggesting piglets were more vigorous, ensuring that extra piglets born alive survived to weaning.