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Distinguished Visitor Award - An Afternoon with Flemming Thorup

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Approximately 40 people representing approximately 25,000 sows and their progeny in Victoria attended an afternoon presentation in October by Dr Flemming Thorup from the Pig Research Centre, Copenhagen. Flemming spoke on “Achieving a high litter size and a high piglet survival”.

The average pig farmer in Denmark currently weans 27 pigs per sow per year, and this number has increased by about a pig every 3 years. Whilst average weaning weights are lower than many farms in Australia (7 kg liveweight at 24 days of age), this reproductive performance is certainly impressive! So how do they get such big litters?

- Have a large gene pool. There are over 1 million sows in Denmark.
- Danbred sows’ selection criteria include “liveborn at 5 days of age”.
- Use crossbred fertile females as F1s
- Select the largest piglets in the litter as F1s
- Exploit heterosis by mating the F1 gilt (Yorkshire x Landrace) with a third breed boar (Duroc)
- Mate gilts on their second oestrus, no matter the age
- Remember to flush feed (3kg+) at least 2 weeks before mating

Once these large litters are born, tips to keep them alive include:

- Conduct body condition scoring on sows during gestation to ensure they are in optimal condition to farrow. Over-fat or thin sows are more prone to reduced milk production.
- Ensure each piglet has a functional teat. About 75% of parity 1 and 2 sows in Denmark have more than 13 functional teats.
- Focus attention on piglets for the first 3 days after birth. Ensure piglets get colostrum by placing them at the sows’ udder after birth.
- Even out litters after 12 hours with the birth sow to ensure sufficient colostrum intake.
- Runts left on sows with large litters have a high chance of dying. Best to foster these off to a “runt collecting sow” (Parity 2 sows are best) to improve their survival.



Photo: Flemming Thorup addresses approximately 40 producers at a seminar at DPI Bendigo in October 2012.

Acknowledgements

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