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35 pigs per sow per year - it is possible

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What was considered unrealistic just a few years ago has now become a reality and the first herds in Denmark have surpassed the magic boundary of 35 pigs per sow per year.

In recent years, the pressure towards improved productivity has been massive in Danish pig production. On the average, the Danish sow units produce approx. 27 pigs per sow per year and there is thus a long way to go before reaching the average of 35 pigs per sow per year which some herds in Denmark already produce.

To the question of how this will be possible, the answer is: "You need to have breeding material that is able to yield at a high level as regards live-born pigs per litter (more than 17 on the average) and you have to practise management at a very high level in every way so the reproduction of the sow, farrowing, nursing and the survival of the piglets are influenced for the better.

As regards the breeding material, the Danish pig producers have the resources at hand in form of DanBred LY hybrid dams. Target-oriented breeding has increased the litter size considerably over the last few years and it is possible to obtain more than 17 live-born pigs per litter. At the same time, target-oriented efforts have been made to have vigorous pigs by means of the breeding goals of "live pigs on day 5". At the same time, the last-mentioned breeding goal has resulted in more robust and homogeneous pigs.

In recent years, management in sow herds has been high in the list of priorities for many Danish piglet productions. Conditions concerning reproduction, feeding and housing must be all right if top score results are to be achieved.

Many highly productive herds in Denmark make use of carefully defined working routines in connection with animal attendance. Often, these are laid down in cooperation with pig advisers and special "managers of the farrowing section" who are able to combine a high level of theoretical knowledge about biology, physiology, etc. with a practical approach so it is possible - at herd level - to lay down the most optimal conditions ensuring high productivity.

The chosen strategies and work procedures are retained by a survey in the livestock house including the objective and a brief description of which specific tasks must be carried out. It renders a consistent follow-up on the specified objectives possible and at the same time it is a powerful instrument to communication between the manager and the employees in the sow unit.

If you have an end in view concerning farrowing rate, number of live-born pigs, mortality in the farrowing section, dry sow days, weaned pigs per litter, gestation rate, etc., it results in improved productivity in most cases.

Consistent management in sow units induces good experiences and results. The results are obvious in form of high productivity. At the same time, many owners of pig herds and employees in sow units indicate that it is an incentive approach to work in which the job satisfaction is the principal element contributing to continuously striving for increasingly better results.

Correspondingly, objectives can be made for a number of conditions concerning the pigs. It could be climatic strategies in the farrowing section during the nursing period, temperature strategy in the covered creep area, a plan for using nursing sows, plan for litter equalisation, etc.

Climatic strategies should always be worked out individually dependent on the technical control options and the layout of the livestock house/section. In this connection, it is important to note the basic differences between farrowing sections with fully slatted floor and farrowing sections with partly slatted floor.

Example of a strategy for the ambient temperature in farrowing sections

House layout	Farrowing until day 4	Day 4 - 14	Day 14 - weaning
Partly slatted floor	20 - 22° C	To be reduced 0.3° C per day	17 - 18° C
Fully slatted floor	22 - 23° C	20 - 22° C	20° C



Temperature strategy for the covered creep area can be worked out in the same way. However in practice, the focus is often concentrated on the behaviour of the piglets - how they lie in the corner. If it is too warm, they spread over a larger area. If it is too cold, they huddle together in layers. The photo shows an example where the piglets have the right temperature in the covered creep area.