

Study finds free farrowing the least efficient birthing system



JYGA Technologies was just one of the companies offering farrowing and feeding systems at Le Porc Show

Over a year of trials 792 litters were monitored to determine the best performance among conventional crates of varying dimensions, as opposed to lift crates and free farrowing

BY TOM VAN DUSEN
Ontario Farmer

Quebec City – The optimum size of farrowing crates and the impact of lift floors on piglet performance and mortality was one of the many technical issues tackled during the 10th edition of Le Porc Show held recently at the Quebec City Convention Centre.

Organized by Quebec Pork Producers and partners, the show featured speakers and workshops in several subjects, 70 exhibitors, along with a major networking component. Discussions revolved around birthing, growing and market-

Lino Saputo named to Order of Canada

Lino A. Saputo, third generation owner of Saputo Inc., has been named to the Order of Canada.

He is chairman of the board. Under his leadership the company built on its mozzarella cheese business to become Canada's largest milk processor, and expanded to the United States.

It now also owns substantial operations in Australia and Argentina and is among the top 10 dairy companies in the world.

ing pork, to the best ways of cooking it.

The session on farrowing crates was presented by Sebastien Turcotte, a manager with Le Centre du developpement du porc du Quebec – Quebec Pork Development Centre – an expert in sow management, building layout, loading docks, animal welfare standards, and ventilation.

Turcotte's duties include preparing funding applications, research projects, writing reports, and consulting with pork breeders. His comments were primarily aimed at producers whose farrowing crates have reached the end of their service life, and those considering renovation or expansion wondering what type and size of crate provides the best technical and economical performance.

Over a year of trials ending September 2022 at the pork development centre, 792 litters were monitored to determine best performance of conventional crates of varying dimensions (up to 6 x 9 ft.) as opposed to lift crates and free farrowing.

Some adjustments were made to account for piglet size and grouping, and two heat sources automatically switched on the day before planned farrowing. No milk replacer or creep feeding was provided, no nurse sow to save runts, and no separate water source for piglets.

It was the same floor for conventional crates and lift with eight-inch elevation when in the down position. Free farrowing crates provided protection bars for piglets to limit crushing and access to the piglet nest at any time.

As to results over the trials, the number of live born and

still-born piglets wasn't significantly different be it conventional, lift, or free farrowing. The birth-weaning mortality rate was significantly higher than the other methods in the free farrowing configuration.

Crushing was the number one cause of mortality followed by natural death of runts and euthanasia of piglets too small to make the grade. The number of piglets weaned per litter was highest with lift crating, closely followed by conventional, with free farrowing coming in third.

There was no significant dif-

ference in average daily weight gain which was slightly higher with the conventional approach.

As for sow health, there was no noticeable difference between crate systems with lactation, feed intake, weight and back fat remaining constant.

Based on the trials, Turcotte offered general observations on crating: While the lift floor requires less surveillance, lower crushing mortality and it's easier to capture and wean piglets, greater maintenance is needed and there's a chance of leg scratching.

Turning to free farrowing, the sow is more able to move, there's an improved maternal relationship and a better image for livestock production; on the downside, piglets have more difficulty locating a heat sources, there are greater, sometimes hazardous, handling complications for workers, and weaning takes longer.

As to return on investment, Turcotte concluded there's little profitability to be gained short term by adding to an existing building to accommodate larger or lift floor crates.

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2024 Zone Meetings For the Election of Councillors, Delegates & Directors For Egg Farmers of Ontario

ZONE	DATE	LOCATION	TIME
1	January 18	Royal Canadian Legion, Wyoming	12:00 pm
2	January 18	Caradoc Sands, Strathroy	5:30 pm
3	January 16	Elmhurst Inn, Ingersoll	5:00 pm
4	January 11	Hernder Estate Wines, St. Catharines	3:30 pm
5	February 15	White Carnation Restaurant, Holmesville	5:30 pm
6	January 8	Stratford Country Club, Stratford	5:30 pm
7	January 8	Knox Presbyterian Church, Listowel	12:00 pm
8	January 25	Holiday Inn Peterborough Waterfront, Peterborough	4:30 pm
9	January 23	The Mill Restaurant, Brockville	4:30 pm
10	January 24	St.Isidore Recreation Center, St. Isidore	3:00 pm
PULLET	AGM	Fallsview Casino & Resort, Niagara Falls	TBC

*A notice of meeting will be emailed (and mailed to those without email) to the respective farmers prior to the meeting.
If you have not received your invitation, please call the Board office at 1-800-387-8360 to RSVP

Voting Eligibility: All persons voting must qualify as a "producer" as defined in the Farm Products Marketing Act R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 409 Eggs-Plan. Under the Act, a "producer" means a person engaged in the production of chicks for placement, eggs, hatching eggs, or fowl.

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