

PIGLET MORTALITY IN FARROWING PENS WITH OR WITHOUT THE MEDATA BLOWAWAY SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

The 'Medata Blowaway System' is a portable device designed to blow warm air under the sow while she is standing, to encourage piglets to move out of the crate area. The airflow is automatically switched off when the sow lies down.

The trial examined the use of the 'Medata Blowaway System' and its effect on piglet mortality, particularly the number of piglets overlaid by the sow. Due to the constraints imposed by a farm trial the number of litters involved was relatively small and this should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

METHOD

The trial utilized four identical farrowing rooms operated on a batch farrowing system. 'Blowaway' units were fitted to two of the five crates to give contemporary comparisons. Allocation of crates was randomized to take account of pen position and sow parity. The unit was left on the crate for the first 48 h post farrowing.

The ADAS piglet mortality classification scheme was used to record reasons for piglet deaths pre-weaning. Approximately half of the total number of pigs lost were

sent to the MAFF Veterinary Investigation Centre for post-mortem examination.

Video equipment was used to record piglet behaviour when the sow was standing.

RESULTS

TABLE 1
Litter performance

	Without 'Blowaway' (control)	With 'Blowaway' (treatment)	s.e.d.
No. of litters	98	71	
Total no. of pigs born alive	1086	783	
Average no. pigs born alive	11.08	11.03	0.311
Average no. pigs lost	1.20	0.89	0.169
Piglet survival (%)	89.2	91.9	
Average no. pigs lost throughoverlying	0.67	0.35*	0.141

TABLE 2
Reasons for piglet deaths

	Without 'Blowaway' (control)		With 'Blowaway' (treatment)	
	No.	% total pigs born alive	No.	% total pigs born alive
Small non-viable	6	0.6	3	0.4
Starved	13	1.2	6	0.8
Overlaid	66	6.1	25	3.2
Blind anus	1	2.9	1	3.7
Splay legs	1			
Other deformity	2			
Savaged				
Other injury	1			
Runt	4		3	
Joint ill	1			
Unknown	22		19	
Total piglet mortality	117	10.8	63	8.1

TABLE 3
Piglet behaviour when the sow was standing

	(% total time)			
	Resting in creep area	Active in creep area	Active in main pen	Active in crate area
With 'Blowaway'	67.1	28.4	2.8	1.7
Without 'Blowaway'	67.6	23.7	2.6	6.1

CONCLUSIONS

- (1) The 'Blowaway' significantly reduced the number of pigs lost through overlaying.
- (2) The 'Blowaway' appeared to be effective in encouraging piglets to move out of the crate area when the sow was standing. However there was no evidence of a carry-over effect when the machine was removed.