

Book Reviews

The Gestating and Lactating Sow

Edited by C Farmer (2015). Published by Wageningen Academic Publishers, PO Box 220, NL-6700 AE Wageningen, The Netherlands. 452 pages Hardback (ISBN 978-90-8686-253-5). Price €95.00, US\$142.00.

The Gestating and Lactating Sow edited by Chantal Farmer is an ambitious project bringing health, welfare, behaviour, management, nutrition, lactation biology and more, under one umbrella, with the help of 33 authors from 10 different countries. Such a comprehensive volume about all things sow is long overdue. For many of us who began their research careers studying sows in the last few decades of the 20th century, a key text on our shelves was *The Sow — Improving Her Efficiency*, written by Peter English, Bill Smith and Alastair MacLean. Here was the information source that unashamedly focused on the combination of the welfare and husbandry of the sow at all stages of her life with the purpose for which she is kept — that is to produce as many healthy and thriving offspring as possible for the farmer to rear profitably. It was a concise summary of the science as it existed when it was written (1977 & 1982) but with a primary audience of the practical farmer or student of pigs, a reference-free text. Its appeal was the conversion of weighty science into fully accessible information, and this expanded the readership to pig scientists across the spectrum of academia and industry. Those citing the book read like a ‘who’s who’ of pig science. And so, it is against this benchmark that any book with the word ‘sow’ in the title may be judged, perhaps unfairly, as books are not all written with the same audience in mind.

The Gestating and Lactating Sow has similar lofty aims to be the one-stop source for the science of rearing and maintaining the sow during her productive life. Given the multiple authors and the scientific literature review concept of the 19 individual chapters, it is not surprising that it does not have the easy readability of the English *et al* book, but it does do a great job of summarising current knowledge and combining the various disciplines within animal science into a book that should be an invaluable source of information in its own right and one that can point the way towards more in-depth sources if the reader so desires. As a welfare scientist specialising in pigs, the content of 4 of the chapters was wholly familiar and a further 4 were partially familiar. The other 11 lie outside my immediate knowledge base, being concerned with nutrition, lactation biology and reproductive physiology. Of the welfare-centric chapters, there’s a good summary of gestation housing systems by Hans Spoolder and Herman Vermeer, which covers the crucial aspects of system components such as flooring and feeding system together with critical management factors of timing of mixing, control of aggression, group size

and composition, and space allowance. Sandra Edwards and Emma Baxter cover all the pertinent information on the causes and prevention of piglet mortality, resulting in a fine, up-to-date synopsis of the issue. The role of human-animal interactions on both sow and piglet welfare and productivity is comprehensively addressed by Armelle Prunier and Céline Tallet and who better to cover nursing behaviour but two of the experts in Marek Špinko and Gudrun Illmann.

There are also welfare components, to a greater or lesser extent, within the chapters that cover high fibre diets for gestating sows (by Marie-Christine Meunier-Salaün and Elizabeth Bolhuis), farrowing/lactation housing and management (by Olli Peltoniemi and Claudio Oliviero), sow health (by Bob Friendship and Terri O’Sullivan) and sow longevity (by Julia Calderón Díaz, Marja Nikkilä and Ken Stalder). These chapters nicely summarise the issues, breaking down the content into relevant sections and making the science accessible to specialist and non-specialist. The remaining chapters may, at first glance, seem of little interest or relevance to welfare scientists, but they are no less important to the overall aims of the book. It is also extremely important for us to be more ‘rounded’ in our field of work and to understand the production system holistically and not just through the eyes of our specialisation. At the end of the day, livestock production is about supplying a commodity that is high quality, affordable, healthy and provides a profit for the farmer, whilst ensuring welfare of the animals is maximised and safeguarded. In order for us as welfare scientists to participate in this dialogue and effect change where deemed necessary, it is essential to have a full understanding of the livestock ‘system’ and how our work may impact other aspects of that system.

According to the back-cover text, the content of *The Gestating and Lactating Sow* “will assist animal scientists, nutritionists, veterinarians and swine producers in learning the most recent information on relevant and current topics affecting sow production, and in knowing which areas are in need of further research.” How does it measure up? I certainly think it hits the mark with the intended scientific readership, but it does not have that easy readability of the English *et al* book, that swine producers loved. That said, the content is comprehensive, detailed without being overly meticulous and, importantly, summarises the state of our knowledge right now, as well as the gaps. As Editor, Chantal Farmer has done a great job in choosing the chapter authors, standardising the flow and content of the chapters, and producing a book worthy of addition to any swine scientist’s library.

Jeremy N Marchant-Forde,

USDA-ARS, Livestock Behavior Research Unit, West Lafayette, USA