

# Streaming Pigs

One of the problems encountered in all-in/all-out programmes is what to do with the pigs, which fail to keep up with the main group! Many of these pigs are recognisable at weaning being the smallest pigs. While individual pigs can catch up, as a group, smaller pigs or pigs which fall back, never grow as quickly as the unchecked group.

## **The pigs which are compromised pose three major problems.**

- Extreme variable finishing weights, 75-95 kg meaning the finishing house is emptied over a long period, ideally each finishing room should be emptied in two weeks but it is not uncommon to see 3 to 4 weeks instead which is expensive in finishing floor area utilisation.
- At weaning compromised pigs require extreme care and help which can be difficult to provide particularly if big pig pens are used.
- Because compromised pigs are under more stress they are more likely to succumb to diseases and while they may not die (at least initially), they are likely to infect their pen mates.

To provide for these compromised pigs a streaming concept has been devised. At the point of weaning select the bottom 10% of the pigs and move them to different accommodation. The 90% top pigs are then moved into the traditional hot nursery. The smaller pigs ideally should go into a straw pen with some additional heating. These 10% of animals can now receive extra help and attention including antibiotics where necessary. The 90% healthy can now be treated as normal and on farms it has reduced post-weaning antibiotics or even remove the need for in-feed antibiotics altogether from these weaners.

Assuming there are 4 weeks of hot nursery to take the pigs from weaning at 7 kg to 18 kg – the compromised pigs will require 5 weeks to achieve 18 kg.

The steaming concept is divided into three areas.

### 1. Weaning

At the point of weaning select the bottom 10% of the pigs and move them to separate accommodation. It is essential that these animals are not housed with the bulk of the pigs. The ideal is to keep them away from the healthy 90%. The 90% best pigs are moved into the traditional hot nursery (first stage flat deck).

The 10% compromised pigs can now receive additional help and care including where necessary antibiotics, water medication, porridge fed 8 x daily, perhaps for 6-8 days. Note it is important to mimic 'mum' immediately after weaning to stimulate and teach these pigs to eat and drink. Prior to weaning they are eating and drinking 10-20 times a day, post weaning humans only feed them once or twice a day, modern post-weaning management is hardly copying nature.

On several farms the healthy 90% are now not medicated and only receive very expensive creeps for 3 days.

## 2. One week post weaning

Up to 5% of the healthy pig group can be moved into the compromised pig's area joining the same age group. This allows for any fading pigs to be catered for and receive appropriate treatment. If there are no animals fading then there is no need to disturb the group.

The streaming system has allowed for a better utilisation of stockpeople and resources. The 90% healthy pigs could receive the normal 3 days intensive care post weaning. The compromised pigs on the other hand can receive 7 days intensive care which is an obvious reason for their improved survival.

## 3. The healthy 85-90% pigs at 18 kg

On most farms it takes 3-4 weeks for pigs to grow to 18-20 kg at which point they are moved into the second stage nursery.

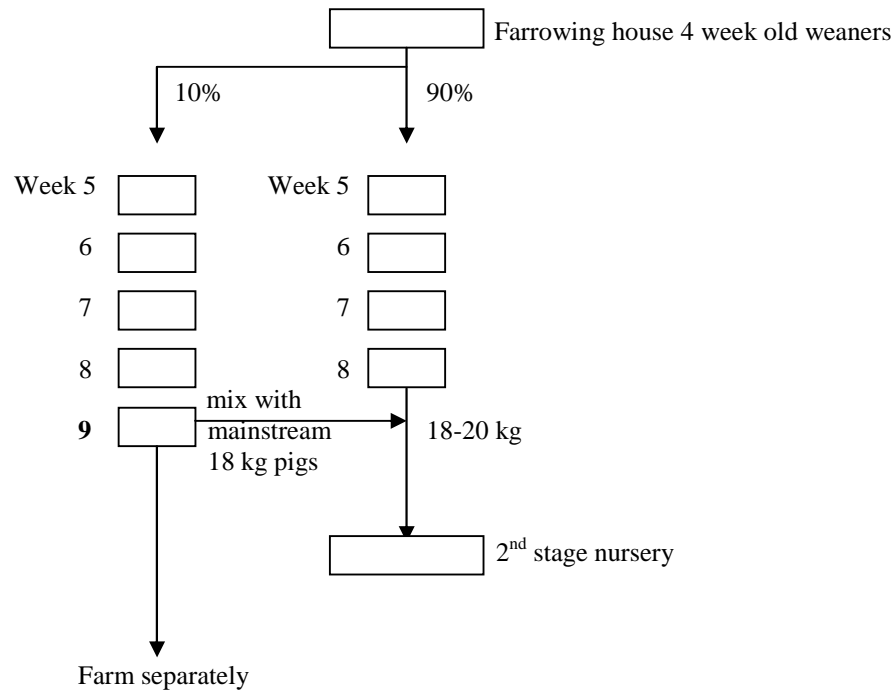
## 4. The 10% compromised pigs at 18 kg

They remain in their special accommodation until they are about 18-20 kg which on most farms takes 4 ½-5 weeks. At 18 kg the compromised pig group have two options.

- 1) They mix into a healthy group of 18-20 kg pigs which are naturally one week younger. This obviously breaks the all-in/all-out rules but mixing of two groups of 18 kg animals which are more mature, in particular with regard to their immune system, is safer than mixing animals at any time after day 10 when maternal antibodies start to wane.
- 2) They remain separated from the main group and are farmed separately, either to sale weight or bacon weight. While this is the best option and maintains all-in/all-out, this option is very difficult or impractical in small farms working with small numbers of compromised pigs. Note, however, these pigs all come from the same farm and have the same 'health' status. However, on large units especially on outdoor units this can be a very practical option.

When the compromise group gets to 18 kg it is imperative that pigs are selected. Those who are unlikely to economically succeed must be destroyed. While selection is generally difficult for any stockperson at weaning, it has been found that at 9 weeks of age pigs that are only 12 kg it is obvious that they are not going to make it. The removal of these sick pigs is a major reason for the success of streaming.

## The basic streaming concept



### **Advantages experienced so far**

1. Quicker emptying of the finishing house – variation at finishing of only 85-95 kg instead of 75-95 kg. Better floor space utilisation.
2. No problems at 18-20 kg with mixing pigs.
3. Reduction of antibiotic usage – up to 70% on three farms, in particular injectable and in-feed medication.
4. Decreased post weaning fading weaners.
5. More prompt treatment of compromised weaners.
6. Reduction in post weaning mortality although some of this has been balanced with the destroying of sick pigs.
7. Better use of stockperson time and resources.

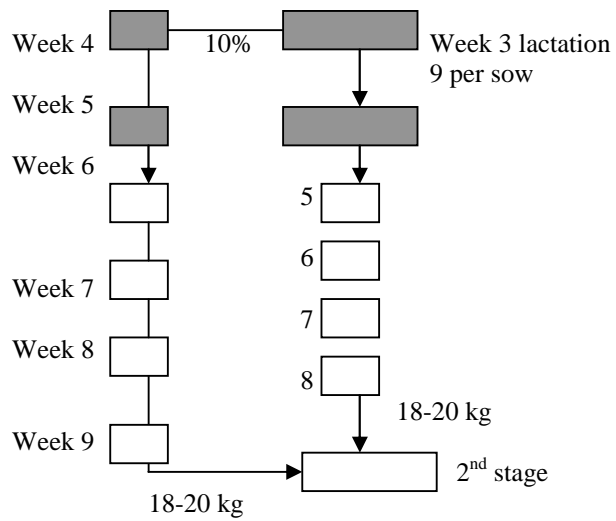
### **Adaptations for the basic form**

As with any idea, once tried there have been some successful adaptations already. The one which has worked well is to identify the 10% compromised at week 3 of lactation i.e. when they are 16-21 days old and on weaning day move them onto a suitably newly weaned sow i.e. good mother, long narrow teats, possibly a gilt (to enhance her reproduction) therefore leaving 9 piglets on the original sow.

The moved 10% are placed on their new mother(s) and left for at least 2 weeks. Therefore, they are actually weaned at 5 weeks. They are then moved into the compromised weaner accommodation and mixed with the main group again at 18 kg. Note to ensure service targets are met for the first 2 weeks extra gilts are needed to accommodate the nurse sows.

After 2 weeks the nurse sows return to the breeding pool.

### The advanced streaming concept



### Summary

The streaming system is a means of better caring for the poor pigs at weaning time and allows for their successful integration back into the main group, albeit into a group a week younger.