

## **Less antibiotics when weaning piglets**

**Weaning piglets from sows at the age of four to five weeks is one of the most difficult periods in weaning of piglets.**

by Dr. Nicole Herout

Piglet health essentially depends on a problem-free birth process, good colostrum supply and sufficient milk from the mother. All three factors are by no means self-evident, as problems such as delayed birth, MMA, increased germ pressure or excessive numbers of piglets are very common.

In order to avoid losses in the first days of life, many piglets are supplied with antibiotics on the first day of life.

However, this first treatment also causes a disturbance in the development of the intestinal flora of these newborn animals.

As early diarrhoea, mostly caused by E. Coli, is still a common occurrence, further treatment often follows soon.

Since such pre-treated piglets are more susceptible, many pig farmers are forced to add antibiotics to the feed during the weaning phase, in addition to zinc substitutes. This is a fixed routine in many farms, regardless of any additional individual therapies required for particular problem groups.

Unfortunately, in reality this often means that piglets have already undergone three to six antibiotic treatments by the time they reach the fattener at 30 kg live weight.

Solutions are to stabilise sow health and strengthen the intestinal flora of the piglets so that they can cope more effectively with the various feed changes.

### **The health of sows is in the foreground**

In order to immunologically strengthen the sows for the birth phase, in addition to feeding them with raw fibres before birth, a support of the intestinal flora through various probiotics and the early administration of herbs that strongly stimulate the body's defence have proven effective.

The use of bentonites, such as montmorillonite or zeolite, also helps very well in this phase to bind and eliminate free radicals, inflammatory products and possible pollutant or fungal toxin contamination.

This detoxification cure, combined with an activation of the intestinal flora and the strengthening of the immune system, helps the sow to better endure the stress of giving birth under unfortunately mostly unphysiological conditions.

In order to speed up the birth process, homeopathy has developed an absolutely reliable remedy as an alternative to oxytocin-containing, contraceptive remedies. The product is called "Caullophyllum D12", used routinely in many farms. It has the advantage that there is no cramping of the uterus, which considerably reduces the risk of a rupture.

A speedy birth is on the one hand less stressful for the sow, but on the other hand good contractions and after contractions are an essential factor in quickly ejecting the afterbirths after the piglets and thus reducing the risk of uterine inflammation.

A fit sow runs much less risk of getting fever after birth and can therefore also produce a better colostrum quality. If the sow that has been prepared in this way has enough good milk, the piglets can grow up without any problems and without the need for antibiotics. These young animals have a much more stable intestine, as the young intestinal flora, which is still in development, has not already been disturbed on several occasions.

However, a really delicate phase is the weaning. This phase can be significantly eased with the preventive use of highly concentrated herbal mixtures, which should be routinely mixed into the starter feed as early as possible. It has also been shown that the use of higher concentrations of bentonite in weaning feed has a further positive effect.

### **How to proceed?**

If early diarrhoea occurs in the first epoch of life, an herbal mixture can be injected into the affected piglets' mouths, which consistently has calming, gas-braking and stuffing effects on the intestinal motor function.

Since the animals do not eat independently at this age, these herbs must be mixed with water and injected into the mouth. The advantage is that in addition to a rapid stabilisation the destruction of the intestinal milieu under construction can be avoided.

### **Initial feeding**

If small amounts of herbs and bentonite are gradually mixed into the premix feed offered, the taste tolerance is trained on the one hand and toxins and faulty fermentation products are bound on the other hand and the vitality of the piglets is strengthened.

### **Weaning feed**

Animals prepared by this method can then be weaned without the addition of any antibiotics. The amount of zinc replacement can also be significantly reduced. Instead, the mixing in of 2 kg/600 kg of a highly concentrated, intestinal regulating herbal mixture, as well as 2 to 3 kg/600 kg of a very high-quality bentonite, such as clinoptilolite, zeolite or montmorillonite, has proved to be a good solution as a safe substitution for the feeding of antibiotics.

The advantage of this procedure is not only the stabilisation of the intestines but also the avoidance of the growth depression following the antibiotics in the first week after weaning. The piglets continue to grow better, often reach their weight a few days earlier and the fatteners notice a more resilient animal health.

### **Example with operating data of a piglet farmer from Lower Austria, with about 220 sows:**

In **2016** about 4,800 piglets were marketed. Breeding capacity: approx. 80 days to 30 kg

Antibiotic consumption: A total of 46 kg of three different antibiotics against early diarrhoea, weaning diarrhoea and prophylaxis during weaning were used for all 17 groups. In addition, also 102 kg of zinc substitute were applied. Total costs of antibiotics and zinc per group of 280 animals per year: approx. 210 Euro x 17 = 3,570 Euro

In **2017**, 4,900 piglets were marketed. Breeding capacity: approx. 80 days to 30 kg

A total of 45 kg of the three different antibiotics and 102 kg zinc substitute was used again.

Total costs of antibiotics and zinc replacement per group of 290 animals per year: approx. 250 Euro x 17 = 4.250 Euro

In **2018** 5,160 piglets were sold, the rearing performance was slightly improved and was then approximately 77 days to 30 kg. With occasional piglet early diarrhoea, the vitality and intestinal health supporting herbs were successfully applied.

In the third week of rearing, an herbal mixture was already used approximately seven days before weaning and in the first six weaning days, which prevented the usual diarrhoea by its intestinal regulating composition.

For this purpose, 2 to 3 kg of clinoptilolite were mixed in.

In addition, the zinc replacement was reduced by half in the first two weeks of rearing.

Expenditure: 6 kg herbs, 3 kg zinc substitute, 8 kg clinoptilolite / group of 280 to 300 piglets.

In 2018 no antibiotics were used for piglet diarrhoea, neither for the treatment of early diarrhoea nor in prophylaxis or therapy during weaning.

The financial expenditure per group of weaned piglets for herbs and clinoptilolite amounted to approx. 90 Euro x 18 = 1,620 Euro.

In all three annual calculations, only the respective cost of materials for the treatment of diarrhoea was calculated.

Since mid-October 2018, an immune-strengthening herbal mixture combined with a probiotic mixture has also been used successfully in breeding sows from 10 days before birth. Since this measure, the amount of antibiotics used by sows has decreased significantly and the milk flow has improved considerably.

The birth process has also improved using homeopathic remedies in sows.

In conclusion, I have to say that piglet rearing with the herbal treatment works very well and the feedback from the fatteners is also very positive.

## **Conclusion**

The figures of the example farm clearly show that a reduction of antibiotics can be achieved by systematic, preventive management measures. This not only affects the fitness and vitality of the piglets, but also the the farmer's wallet.

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