

ON-FARM CHECKS

Although actual feed prices are largely beyond your control, there are a number of routine checks that you can complete on your unit to assess efficiency. It is likely that you will be doing a number of these already, but take the time to specifically look around your unit and double check that this is actually the case - you may be surprised!

Feeding space: Is there adequate feeder/hopper space for the number and size of pigs in the pen, take time to look, are pigs crowding around the feed hopper or trough?

Weight of pig (kg)	Trough/hopper length/pig	
	Restrict feed (mm)	Ad lib feed (mm)
5	100	75
10	130	33
15	150	38
35	200	50
60	240	60
90	280	70
120	300	75

Feed flow rates: Are all the hoppers working correctly? Adjust the feeder flow rates to maintain intake but reduce wastage. Depending on the hopper, flow rates may need to be adjusted as the pigs grow - “be a pig” and check each hopper to ensure that the feeding system works!

Feed quality: The presence of dust, “fines” or lumps of clogged feed will reduce feed intake. Check if the hopper or auger mechanism is damaging/crushing the feed or affecting the pellet size, increasing wastage.

Storage: Inspect bins and check feed for signs of mould and mites. If found, identify the source eg clogged feed in the hopper or poor storage (ie damp and humid). If mould is present discard the affected feed and take remedial actions immediately.

Spillage: How much feed is being wasted from falling down between the slates or being spilt onto the floor around the trough and spoilt? This is expensive wastage. Identify why this is happening; is the hopper design incorrect for the size of pig, is overstocking causing uneven feeding, do feeder flow rates require adjustment or do the feed hoppers or feed system require repair?

Feed orders: Review your storage capacity and when placing feed orders discuss optimal load sizes with your feed supplier.

Water: Check water availability and flow rates. Water intake drives feed intake and therefore affects growth rate and FCR.

- Are there sufficient **functioning** drinkers, providing a ready source of clean water ie at least 1 nipple drinker per 10 pigs
- Check flow rates - it is simple to check the flow rate, you just need a measuring jug/cylinder and a watch. Adequate **flow rates** are as essential as the **number** of drinkers.

Weight of pig (kg)	Daily requirement (litres)	Minimum flow rate through nipple drinkers (l/min)
Newly weaned	1.0 - 1.5	0.3
Up to 20	1.5 - 2.0	0.5 - 1.0
20 – 40	2.0 - 5.0	1.0 - 1.5
Finishing pigs up to 100	5.0 - 6.0	1.0 - 1.5
Sows & gilts – pre-service and in-pig	5.0 - 8.0	2.0
Sows & gilts – lactation	15 - 30	2.0
Boars	5.0 - 8.0	2.0

Source: Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock – Pigs (Defra)

- Are drinkers at the correct height for stage of pigs and are they correctly positioned to allow ready access?

Fighting: Is there evidence of ear biting or fresh shoulder scars in the group from fighting at around the feeder? This is an indication there may not enough feeding space or that hopper placement/access is inadequate and requires improvement.

Hygiene: Check that the feeders are clean and that there is no caked feed or fouling in the feeder trough area. This should be cleaned out on a daily basis, to reduce wastage and to encourage intake.

Vermin and birds: Is there evidence of rodents and birds on your unit? Look again at rodent and bird control, when was the last time the bait was changed, is it time to change it? Not only are vermin a health risk, but also can lead to expensive feed waste.

Temperatures: Monitor the daily min/max temperatures within buildings. High temperatures reduce the appetite and therefore growth rate of pigs. Cold temperatures cause pigs to use energy to maintain body temperature, rather than using it to grow.

Category of pig	Temperature (°C)	Temperature (°F)
Sows	15 – 20	59 – 68
Suckling pigs in creeps	25 – 30	77 – 84
Weaned pigs (3-4 weeks)	27 – 32	81 – 90
Later weaned pigs (5 weeks +)	22 – 27	71 – 80
Finishing pigs (porkers)	15 – 21	59 – 70
Finishing pigs (baconers)	13 - 18	55 – 64

Source: Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock – Pigs (Defra)

Take time to look at the group of pigs, are they huddling, do they look comfortable?

Health: Ensure all sick pigs are identified as soon as possible and treated immediately.

If you would like your system to be audited for these points by a member of the BPEX Knowledge Transfer Team contact us: kt@bpex.org.uk.

Look out for a series of BPEX autumn workshops: *Improving Feed Efficiency of the Grower/Finisher*

