Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

Pack 12, Item 9

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**A good start for your baby pigs**

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Information on this subject area was requested by DCFRN participants in Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras,Kenya, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

Presenter: George Atkins

Interviewee: Haynesley Benn, (DCFRN participant), General Manager, Barbados Agricultural Society, Bridgetown, Barbados

**Special note**

Before using the information in this item, please read the notes at the end concerning related DCFRN items.

**Suggested introduction**

We at this radio station are part of a world-wide information network that gathers farming information from developing countries all over the world. It's the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, Massey Ferguson, and the University of Guelph.

Through this Network, we bring you information on ways to increase food supplies for your family, or to sell—ways that other farmers have used successfully.

Today our subject is baby pigs and some hints on how you can get them started right. Here's George Atkins.

**ATKINS:** Just for a moment, think of the people you know who aremost successful with the pigs they raise. One of their secrets of success is most likely that they take special care to give their baby pigs a good start.

*Care of sow and preparation for birth of baby pigs*

First off, they take good care of the mother. If she's a young sow being bred for the first time, they don't breed her when she is too young, not before eight or nine months of age. There's another very important thing—they take the trouble to write down the breeding date and count about 113 days ahead on the calendar. They mark that date too so they'll know when to expect the baby pigs to be born.

These farmers make sure they feed their sow properly, they give her plenty of water to drink, and they see that she has lots of exercise. With care like that, all the baby pigs are much more likely to be born strong and healthy. Another thing—the farmers I'm talking about always treat their sow gently and quietly so she knows and trusts them. Then the last day or two before she has her babies, and for a day or so afterwards, they feed her a little less than usual but mix her feed with a bit more water than usual so it's kind of sloppy.

There's something else that most successful pig farmers do. When the time comes for their sow to give birth to her litter of baby pigs, they always have a clean pen ready. The pen can be scrubbed and cleansed with boiling hot water, allowed to dry, then bedded with chopped dry grass or straw.

Now there's one special thing about this pen. There should be a sturdy rail attached to the wall a little above the floor all the way around the inside of the pen. You see, when the sow lies down, she often likes to lie with her back against the wall. The rail keeps her body out from the wall a little when she lies down. This way, no baby pigs can get squeezed between the sow and the wall; they just slide in under the rail and are safe. When you put a rail like this in the pen, it should be about 20 centimetres (8 inches) up from the floor and the outside of the rail should be about 20 centimetres (8 inches) out from the wall.

The most successful pig farmers are always on hand when the baby pigs are being born, even at night if necessary. I think you would agree with me that it would be better to lose a little sleep than to lose two or three baby pigs just because you weren't there to help them, perhaps to clean something off or out of their nose and mouth so they can breathe right after they're born, or to help them in other ways.

But now let's think a little more about these baby pigs. You'll want to do everything you can to be sure that as many of them as possible grow up to be good, strong, healthy pigs. Quite often, of course, there are one or two pigs in the litter that are very weak, much smaller than all the rest, so small and weak that their brothers and sisters don't even let them get any milk from the mother.

When your sow gives birth to a weakling or "runt" like this, count the number of baby pigs you have and then count the number of nipples on your sow. If there are more young pigs than nipples, you must make a choice about what to do with the weakest ones. If you can take the time to see that they get enough milk and a goodstart in life, they will grow just fine. But if you haven't got time to do that, it would probably be better not to raise them.

*Removal of baby pigs' needle teeth*

Now let's think for a moment about all of the baby pigs in your litter. Haynesley Benn, General Manager of the Barbados Agricultural Society, told me about the first thing his farmers do as soon as their young pigs have been born.

**BENN:** One of the most important things that is done is clip theneedle teeth. The needle teeth can cause a lot of problems for the mother. They are definitely needle teeth because they are sharp and fine; and when the pigs are fighting for milk, they can cause a lot of damage to the sow's breast (udder and nipples). By clipping the teeth, you can save your sow a lot of discomfort and a lot of problems.

**ATKINS:** How do you do this?

**BENN:** What the farmers do is to take the pliers. It's a regularpair of pliers—you just clip back those needle teeth.

**ATKINS:** Actually, if you have a pair of pliers that will cutwire, you can easily cut off the baby pig's needle teeth as close to the gums as possible, or you can use ordinary pliers to take off the sharp point of each of these teeth.

Now it's very important that you do this as soon as all the pigs have been born. As Haynesley Benn said, those four sharp little teeth that every baby pig has when it's born are as sharp as needles and they can cause a lot of problems.

With those sharp teeth in its mouth a young pig less than one day old, nursing from its mother, can cause the sow so much pain that she may jump up quickly and perhaps step on one or more of her baby pigs. Many little pigs have died this way.

There's another big problem. When those sharp little teeth break the skin of the sow's nipples or her udder, or even the skin of other baby pigs when they are playing, bad germs can get into the wound and cause infection. So be sure that you clip or break off those four sharp teeth in each baby pig's mouth right after they're born.

*Prevention of anaemia in baby pigs*

Now there's one more thing I must tell you about baby pigs. You may have noticed that when a young pig is born, the colour of the moist inside of its mouth is always a good healthy pink colour. (With the white breeds of swine, the newborn pig's ears and belly are also pink). Quite often, however, after a couple of weeks or more, that nice pink color may have changed to white instead ofpink. When baby pigs get this way, we say they are "anaemic" or they have "anaemia." Pigs that are anaemic can get sick more easily and they won't grow as well as healthy pigs.

Young pigs get this way if they haven't been eating something special that they need to stay healthy—like they were when they were born.

During this first two or three, they need iron. I'm not talking about iron like tools are made of but iron in a different form.

If your baby pigs usually lose the pink colour in the inside of their mouths, that is, if they usually become anaemic, there are three different ways that you can give them the special iron they need to keep them healthy. The first two ways will cost money, the third won't cost you any money. I'll tell you about all of them so you can decide which one you'll want to use.

First: You could pay a veterinarian to give each baby pig a"shot" (like a vaccination) of iron.

Second: You could buy a powder called "reduced iron"—put a bit of that in each baby pig's mouth the first day after they are born and repeat that once a week for three weeks. If you do this, be careful not to give them too much—no more than an amount equal to the size of a small pea or a large grain of rice or wheat—that's all.

Now for the third way you can give iron to your baby pigs. This will not cost any money. Just go out once a week some distance from where pigs normally go; dig up a shovelful of fresh soil, or better yet, some soil that's held together with grass roots, a layer of that, about 30 centimetres (1 foot) square. Give it to the pigs to play with. They'll eat a bit of that soil and it has iron in it, all the iron they'll need.

Here's Haynesley Benn once again.

**BENN:** In Barbados, there are many small pig farmers who usually go out in the field, just dig up a nice piece of grass, some grass with the roots in the ground and everything—throw it into the pen and the young pigs will just get into that, root in it, and they can get natural iron from there.

**ATKINS:** Thank you very much, Haynesley Benn, General Manager of the Barbados Agricultural Society here in St. James, in Barbados.

Serving Agriculture, the Basic Industry, this is George Atkins.

**Notes**

1. This item could be split into four separate shorter items:

a) Care of sow and preparation for the birth of baby pigs;

b) Birth and after care of baby pigs;

(c) Removal of baby pigs' needle teeth;

(d) Prevention of anaemia in baby pigs.

2. There are other DCFRN items that contain information related to this item. It may be helpful to the farmers you serve to use some of the information in those items in connection with thisitem. They are:

Keeping Farm Animals Healthy and Productive - DCFRN Package 10, Item 1

Handling Pigs - DCFRN Package 7, Item 7

Getting Rid of Mange or Scabies on Pigs - DCFRN Package, Item 10

**Information sources**

Better Farming Series No. 8 - Animal Husbandry - feeding and care of animals (38 pages), available from Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome, Italy. (Published by arrangement with the Institut Africain pour le developpement economique et social (INADES), Abidjan, Ivory Coast.) http://www.fao.org/3/a-bp054e.pdf