



SHOW SOLUTIONS

Sow Nutrition

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By Dennis Wilber, Show-Rite Specialist

Sow nutrition and management are often some of the most overlooked aspects of show pig production. Instead, focus has been placed on the latest and greatest, newest and hottest, coolest boar, leaving the female as one of the most ignored facets of production. Exorbitant amounts of money are spent on semen, and the sow is expected to raise “the next great one,” breed on the first cycle, carry her litter and farrow her pigs on the least-expensive diet available. However, as a wise man once told me, “Don’t step on dollars to pick up nickels.”

The sow herd is, in fact, the cornerstone of profitability for all show pig operations. The females are the ones that pave the way for fancy pickups, slick trailers and visions of sugar plums dancing in our heads about raising “the next great one.” The fact of the matter is, if you don’t focus on the female side of production and consider them first, you won’t last long in the show pig business. Let’s face facts: Nothing happens until the sow is bred and farrows pigs.

Let’s look at some aspects of proper sow nutrition and how it can affect your bottom line. The nutritional chain is as follows for a sow:

1. She takes care of herself first; this includes keeping herself in maintenance mode and healing after the birthing process.
2. After her maintenance and healing, she is in reproductive mode — she is expected to nurse her litter, to come in heat and to ovulate eggs to be fertilized by high-priced boar semen. Oh, and not to mention, in lactation, she eats a lowered amount of feed for the first three days. Sows don’t eat 12 pounds a day the first day they farrow; they will eat three to five pounds of feed for the first three days, if you’re lucky, and then their lactational feed intake will increase. So, you are at a deficit right out of the gate if you do not feed a nutrient-dense diet in lactation.

As you can see, the sow has a lot of responsibility on her plate. As such, your sow feed program is the LAST place to cut corners and save money. Bottom line? There is no substitute for good nutrition in your sow herd. The one aspect that drives your whole operation is the sow. Why would you want to jeopardize that with cheap feed?

Getting her bred

- Step one: She must cycle.

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- Step two: She must have enough embryos to maintain a litter of pigs. Often, when sows are serviced, they pass over the 21 days and then come in heat at 30 to 35 days. This is sometimes because they didn't have enough embryos in them to carry to full-term. Another possible scenario is that her nutritional needs were not met to properly develop the fetuses.

Here, again, proper nutrition pays. Inexpensive feed can sometimes cost you more than it is worth.

Maintenance

Now, after 35 days, you can be reasonably sure that she is bred; however, the proper nutrition must be provided to maintain the sow's body condition and help develop the litter of pigs that she is carrying. The last two weeks of gestation is when 75–90% of fetal growth occurs. This makes the difference between having a weak, squeaker litter or an active, vigorous litter. During this period, the sow needs enough reserve energy to develop the fetuses while also maintaining or increasing her own body condition to be able to lactate and take care of herself and her litter. Therefore, the last two weeks of gestation are the absolute worst time to increase feed, as the newborns are growing, and you will be pulling pigs or taking them out on their sides. You don't want to try to play catch-up on body condition during the last two weeks of gestation. Again, a nutrient-dense diet is so important to your sow herd.

Maintaining proper body condition in gestation is the key to increased lactational feed intake. Overly fat sows tend to have a lowered lactational feed intake and are more lethargic in farrowing and getting up and down in the crate. If you've done your due diligence in maintaining proper body condition during gestation, you will have a better experience in lactation. Here, again, getting proper nutrition to the sow is key — not finding a cheap cost per bag. You get what you pay for.

Show-Rite OptiSow Blueprint Premix

What makes for a good, sound nutritional program for show pig matrons? The answer is: a balanced diet that is not tag dressing and is nutritionally available to the sow. The question then becomes, "What is REALLY in my sow feed?" Feed tags only tell part of the story; you can't look at a feed tag and know what makes up the nutrition of your sow feed.

Show-Rite is very fortunate to be part of the Alltech family of companies. Alltech has spent the entirety of its 40 years in business developing diets that are nutritionally available to livestock. Alltech's products and programs have taken Show-Rite to the next level regarding nutrition, and its continual research and development of new products keeps Show-Rite on the cutting edge of show animal nutrition.

As a result of this commitment by our parent company, Show-Rite has developed [Show-Rite OptiSow Blueprint Premix](#). This premix is designed with the latest technologies to ensure that you are maximizing the reproductive potential of your sow herd. The Alltech technologies incorporated into this product include:

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- **Sel-Plex®**
A proprietary organic form of selenium yeast and the first EU-approved and FDA-reviewed form of organic selenium.
- **Bioplex®**
A range of organic trace minerals that provides mineral nutrition in a form as close to nature as possible.
- **De-Odorase®**
Keeps manure odor and ammonia levels down; maintains respiratory health.
- **Allzyme® SSF**
A natural complex that improves profitability by maximizing nutrient release.
- **Actigen®**
Provides a natural, cost-effective means of maintaining gut health and integrity to support overall performance.
- **Integral® A+**
A unique product that supports overall performance and helps animals achieve their true potential.

Show-Rite OptiSow Blueprint Premix also contains chromium propionate, which improves glucose metabolism and decreases wean-to-service estrus, as well as L-carnitine, which maximizes the energy status of the sow during gestation and lactation. Show-Rite OptiSow Blueprint Premix now contains Hy-D®, a more readily available form of vitamin D that improves vitamin D status in sows and allows them to reach their productivity targets.

If you'd like to break this down further and hear more from a nutritionist about what these ingredients mean, [check out this video](#).

I'll close with this question: Don't your sows deserve to be fed the best-possible diets to maximize their production of high-quality show pigs? Let your Show-Rite representative design a diet to meet the nutritional needs of your sow herd. Find our contact information [here](#).

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