

## H9 - Nurse sows



**The nurse sow has accepted the piglets.**

**A nurse sow for newborn piglets can save excess piglets at birth. An optimum nurse sow:**

1. Is a first or second parity sow.
2. Is a two-step nurse sow that farrowed 4-8 days ago.
3. Accepts the piglets.
4. Has teats that are available to the piglets.
5. Has a good body condition score.
6. Has taken good care of her own piglets.
7. Is not given more piglets than she has given up.
8. Nursing piglets have received colostrum and are viable.
9. Is moved to the piglets if sectioned operation is practised.



**The nurse sow has not accepted the piglets.**

**An inadequate nurse sow**

- Is an old sow.
- Has already lactated for three weeks before receiving the newborn piglets.
- Does not accept the piglets.
- Is skinny or very fat.
- Is sick.

<b>Additional comments - Nurse sows</b>	
1.	A first or second parity sow usually accepts the piglets within reasonable time. In herds with diarrhoea, you may encounter problems with using first parity sows as nurse sows. It is furthermore likely that a sow older than her second parity, that has previously made a good nurse sow, will quickly accept new piglets.
2.	A sow that has had 4-8 days of lactation is better at accepting day-old piglets than a sow that has given up 21-day-old piglets. Therefore, let the intermediate nurse sow wean her piglets at min. 21 days and give her 4-8-day-old piglets from the nurse sow. The nurse sow then becomes nurse sow to excess newborn piglets that have received colostrum from their own mother. See Appendix 12 - Two-step nurse sow.
3.	Give the sow some straw to calm her. If 1-2 of her own piglets stay in the litter for the first hour, the new piglets will be quicker in getting to the udder.
4.	The nurse sow must have an udder that fits the nursing piglets: small teats for small piglets, large teats for large piglets. Check whether the pen partitions obstruct the piglets' access to the udder.
5.	The nurse sow, and especially the intermediate nurse sow, must have a good body condition score and a healthy appetite to be able to handle the extra nursing period.
6.	The nurse sow and the intermediate nurse sow must have taken good care of their own piglets, so that they have proven a good milk yield.
7.	Do not give a nurse sow more piglets than have been moved from her. The nurse sow and the intermediate nurse sow do not have more active mammary glands than the number of piglets moved from them.
8.	Do not move the nursing piglets from their mother before they have taken in colostrum, ie. nursing piglets can be moved 12 hours after birth. All nursing piglets should be moved within 36 hours after birth. After 36 hours, it is too late to cross-foster. If the sow had more piglets than she had teats for, the smallest piglets will not have received colostrum. Often 3-8 hours will pass before the nursing sow and intermediate sow give the piglets milk for the first time, and the nursing piglets must be strong enough to wait that long.
9.	In a sectioned system, move the nurse sow and the intermediate nurse sow to a pen in the section in which the piglets were born. The nurse sow brings fewer pathogen bacteria than the piglets. The piglets are then weaned at the same time as the other piglets in the section.

**Note** that transfer of piglets and the period in which the sow does not nurse can initiate heat in sows that are weaning their own piglets. As a result, the nurse sow or the foster sow may reach heat on the day of weaning or later than the other sows weaned that day. It is recommended to mark the nurse sows with an A so that you can pay extra attention to those in the service facility. See H26 - Communication between the farrowing facility and other sections; and appendices 10, 11, 12, 13 and 15.