

The effects of alternative lactation housing on stress and performance in piglets around weaning

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Performance results from this investigation support others in that weight gain after weaning is improved by sow separation in lactation inducing a gradual wean.

Importantly, Separation pen (SP) piglets displayed a reduction in cortisol concentrations as a response to the weaning event and showed less maladaptive behaviours, suggesting there was a reduction in weaning stress. This unique finding of a reduced stress response in gradually weaned piglets may help to explain the difference in post-weaning performance. The importance of clarifying that cortisol sampling was unaffected by the order of which samples were collected will encourage future studies to incorporate piglet cortisol measurement when investigating welfare.

Overall, this study was able to provide interesting results on the impacts of weaning stress and how alternative lactation housing may be beneficial in alleviating some of these stressors.