

GUIDE TO REARING YOUR Piglet



Hand rearing a piglet can be very labour intensive, but is incredibly rewarding. However they have a number of unique requirements that make them very different to rearing lambs, kids and calves.

Warmth

Piglets are not born with any brown fat (the emergency form of fat that allows a newborn to keep itself warm after birth). Therefore they are at high risk of chilling to death in the first few weeks.

Naturally a piglet would huddle with its siblings alongside the warmth of its mother. For an orphan, you'll need to provide constant warmth. The first 3 weeks are high risk, but monitor closely at any young age. The environment should be in a dry and draft-free area, indoors. Keep the environment at 30-35°C for the first week, dropping to 22-28°C going forward. They will need an additional source of heat as well as an area to move away, so they can self-regulate. This may be a:

- Heating pad
- Heat lamp
- A hot water bottle or wheat bag (protected with a blanket to avoid burning) can be used short term in an emergency, but needs constant monitoring and reheating day and night

When going out in the cool air, keep excursions short or make a jersey out of a woollen sock.

Feeding – Colostrum

Colostrum is the first milk produced by the sow. It is a rich source of energy as well as giving the piglet a healthy immune system. The mothers colostrum is best as is tailored for the piglet, otherwise the next best thing is another sow on the property. Commercial products can be purchased from a reputable retailer and is a good idea to have on hand. Piglets need colostrum for the first 24hrs before going onto milk.



Feeding – Milk

If sow's milk is unavailable, goats milk is the next closest thing. Cows milk can be hard on a piglet's tummy. Purchase a commercial milk replacer from a reputable retailer and mix to the "piglet guidelines" and you'll be good to go.

Newborns drink almost hourly from the sow, so expect very frequent feedings! Avoid excess volumes per feed, piglets are at high risk of gut disease from overfeeding. Follow the label closely, but beware that at these volumes they are also expected to eat "creep" food to fill up and be ready for early weaning.

Sows feed their piglets lying down, and have short fat teats suited for

the piglets mouth. Therefore **lamb/kid teats are not suitable** as they are long and free flowing; piglets will commonly breathe the milk in and develop pneumonia. If feeding from a bottle use a human baby teat from the supermarket and hold as horizontally as possible. Even safer still, is to train the piglet to drink from a dish, which they tend to pick up very quickly.

Creep Feed - from 10 days

Piglets must have access to "creep feed" (a special meal made for babies) e.g. "NRM Little Pig Pellets". Don't expect them to eat much until a couple of weeks old, then their intake should start increasing. On mum, they would copy her, but orphans may need some extra encouragement by sprinkling milk powder into the meal. The piglet cannot wean until it is taking in a good amount of creep feed every day and is usually around 6-8 weeks old for an orphan, otherwise they won't know where their new food source is coming from.





Weaning

Wean gently by decreasing volumes and feeds, to encourage a greater hard food intake. Fast growing commercial meat breeds on the sow wean at 4 weeks old to spare the sow, but our small kune kune pets would naturally wean around 4-5 months old. Early weaning is considered about 8 weeks old. Continue to feed the piglet diet until 15 weeks old in kunes, or switch to a “grower” diet until 6 months old for fast growing meat breeds. Keep the piglet otherwise stress free and happy, and maintain strict hygiene, as weaning is a high risk time for infections.

Vaccinations

There are a number of vaccines available depending on your goals, but for pet pigs we recommend Lepto-erysipelas and a 5-in-1 vaccine, starting at weaning with a booster 4 weeks later. Lepto-erysipelas is 6 monthly thereafter and 5-in-1 is yearly.

Drenching

Your piglets should be drenched at 3 and 6 months old with a product called *Flubenol*, which reliably kills whipworm – a high risk worm in our young’uns. Watch for signs of scabby, itchy skin, indicating mange, in which case they may need an injection of a different drench called Ivermectin or Doramectin.

We recommended dropping in a faecal sample to test for worms every 6-12 months prior to drenching adults.

Behaviour

Pigs are more intelligent than many breeds of dog, and require social interaction and mental stimulation. *Think about getting at least 2 piglets to have a friend.*



Rooting & Ringing

Nose ringing is performed to prevent pigs from rooting pasture. While a routine procedure, there are considerations and limitations to its use, and it is a painful procedure.

Rooting is a deeply ingrained behaviour for pigs, taking up around 20% of their time. Rooting is performed even when fed a perfect diet. Ringing prevents rooting as a natural outlet, which can result in long term behavioural changes.

Alternatives to ringing

- Set aside a pig-only paddock, when rooting is permitted. Top up the area with hay, peat and branches. Encourage rooting in one area of the paddock by scattering or digging their pellets or kitchen scraps into the ground.
- Encourage rooting in one area by spreading rooting material. Pigs will often choose to root in peat and branches, over hay. If time and space allow plant root vegetables such as swedes to encourage rooting in a certain area.
- Use your pigs to deliberately clear the land and turn over soil fir resowing.

Pigs need ongoing vaccinations, drenching, dental care, hoof maintenance and castration. We also have an information sheet about nose ringing on our website. Book a consult with our vets to discuss a health care plan going forward.

If you have any concerns about your piglets health, please don't hesitate to contact your local Franklin Vets Clinic. We are happy to give advice over the phone on whether the animal requires treatment.