

February 2019

HOW TO KEEP PIGS WARM IN WINTER

Many of us didn't expect another cold winter! Of course, the cold period is not as severe as the so called "beast from the east" in 2018 but we clearly had another lengthy period of frost starting from middle of December until now. Variations in temperature are challenging as well and it is not unusual to see a difference of 15 °C within a day in some areas.

Here are some tips and tricks how to keep your pigs warm in the cold:

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- Know your shed – this means spending time watching which sides, and pens, are more prone to wind and therefore draught. Some sheds are easier to keep temperature at an even level as they are surrounded by protecting hillside or bushes/trees than ones that stand unsheltered on open plan/land
- Block all obvious gaps in external walls or between wall and gale breakers with panels and watch out for any gaps underneath the exit gates/ shutter doors - those need to be either closed with straw or a timber panel
- Block all internal gaps between pen plastic divisions with straw to prevent draughts in the lying area – these are especially damaging
- Place a wad of compacted straw against the concrete wall in your end pens. Concrete is not saving any warmth produced by the pigs and the layer of straw will work as an insulation layer between pigs and wall – just like layers of insulation that are used on building houses
- Apply deep straw bedding to retain a layer of insulation on floor and put fresh straw on top
- Only use rape straw in winter for pigs above 50kg and only for deep straw bedding as rape fibres are too crude/raw and don't provide much fibre material with capacity of insulation
- If you receive *weaned piglets* in cold weather
 - make sure you pull the TERAM as far up to the hopper to create a bigger sheltered area
 - turn hoppers during the day so they block draught coming in from galebreaker/muck area
 - close the pen doors at night to keep warmth in the kennel area

- use PLENTY of straw and use a hay fork to loosen it up as small piglets are not able to break up compressed straw to crawl in
- provide fresh and dry straw twice daily as damp straw loses its insulation quality
- don't put pens of very small pigs in the end pens of the building as those pens are more likely to be colder and receiving more draft from entry gate. If you put them into the middle of 2nd/3rd pen they benefit from the warmth created by stronger pigs in surrounding pens

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- The point at which pigs must increase heat production to keep warm is called the lower critical temperature (LCT). Many factors affect this including body weight, feed intake, age, insulation of the building and floor type. There is also an upper critical temperature (UCT) and the range between the upper and lower ones is called the thermo-neutral zone

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- For every degree below the LCT (lower critical temperature) a growing pig loses approximately 10-12g of liveweight gain per day. A level of 1°C below the LCT during the growing period could cost up to £1.00 in extra feed

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- Be aware of the “chill effect”: the higher the air velocity the lower the actual temperature will feel

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- Although your temperature sensor in the building might give you a temperature within the thermoneutral zone the actual temperature on the concrete floor might be much colder depending on bedding level and weight of the pig (the bigger the pigs the more heat will be produced by them)

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- *Heavier pigs* - even at 120 kg bodyweight - can still get cold especially at night in frosty temperatures. Pigs that are within their thermal comfort zone will lie on their sides barely touching their pen mates but if you see them cuddling up with each other they are surely too cold. For example 25-60 kg pigs should not have LCT than 15 °C in the bedding area, if so you need to apply more bedding

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- *Hospital pens* – pigs that are sick and not able to move and eat much, are not very efficient producing heat to keep their temperature maintenance, therefore it is crucial to even provide more bedding around them. Consider putting the TERAM back up again as they need more support to keep warm than the healthy pigs

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Sources: AHDB pork ventilating pig buildings, The pig site environmental temperatures