

A person wearing a blue work jacket is holding a small, light-colored piglet. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor setting.

 Never Stop Improving

PIC Australia Technical Update & Benchmarking May 2021

Stepwise Survivability-
Fostering



Sows are more prolific

	2011 23 Farms-	2011 Top Value	2020 41 Farms-80,000 SOWS	2020 Top Value
Total Born (Ave)	11.66	12.50	12.89	13.80
Born Alive (Ave)	10.54	11.50	11.81	12.70

Litter size is
good, too
good.....

*Pity they can't
just have 11
and raise 11...*

Is this what we need.....?



Big Litters Need Good Fostering

The aim of Fostering is to get a piglet a drink



Fostering Aims

- Putting them on the right teat.
- Maximize litter integrity (minimal movement).
- Moving the extreme sizes.
- With full-bellies.



When should you do Fostering?

- Just after farrowing when a sow has given birth to more piglets than she has functional teats
 - Making sure that the piglets have had colostrum
 - Split suckling
 - When a sow is sick and can't care for a litter
 - When a sow dies
 - When piglets are losing condition on a sow
-and ideally within the first 24 hours

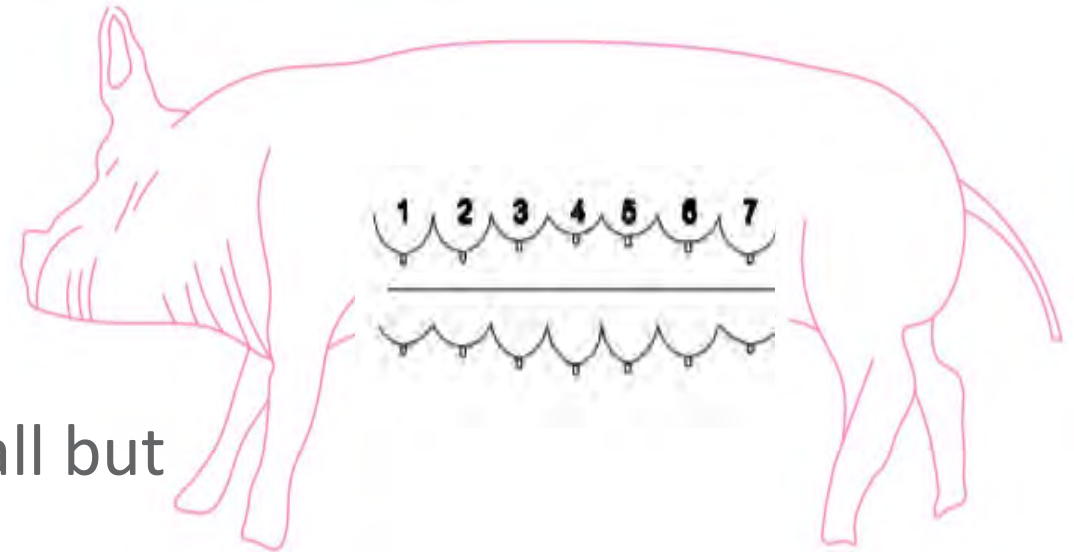
Making up a foster litter

- Done ASAP at any time during the first 12-18 hours.
- Right AFTER getting colostrum (full bellies).
- Keep litter integrity at >80%.
- Move the bigger pig, as they have more chance to compete OR
- Move the smaller pig, if we are making a “small pigs' litter”



Selection of foster sows

- Check sow history
 - Weaned good numbers with few mortalities
 - Less than parity 4
 - Good udder line with at least 12 small but well-formed and positioned teats
 - Check number of functional teats
 - Positions herself well in the crate
 - Good natured (not shy or scared of people)
- What about gilts?
 - Gilts can be great
 - But need to maximise udder stimulation



Making up a foster litter

- Leave until morning craziness is over
 - More opportunity to split suckle any large litters that farrowed overnight
 - Late morning or afternoon?
 - Sows are more settled
 - Time to check frequently before knock-off
 - Don't leave the pigs get chilled in the trolley or in a bucket. Foster them, only when we already know where to put the pigs
- If the sow won't settle
 - Distract her-bran/feed
 - Lock her piglets up with the intended fosters, spray with air freshener, spray sow with same
 - Sedate her

Which pigs should be moved? Never Stop Improving

- Depends but generally the extremes in sizes
 - Big litter that has a few small piglets that are drinking well, move the larger piglets and leave the smaller ones with their mother
 - Or if the small piglets look like they are struggling then they can be fostered to a sow with other small piglets
 - But being small doesn't mean automatic fostering

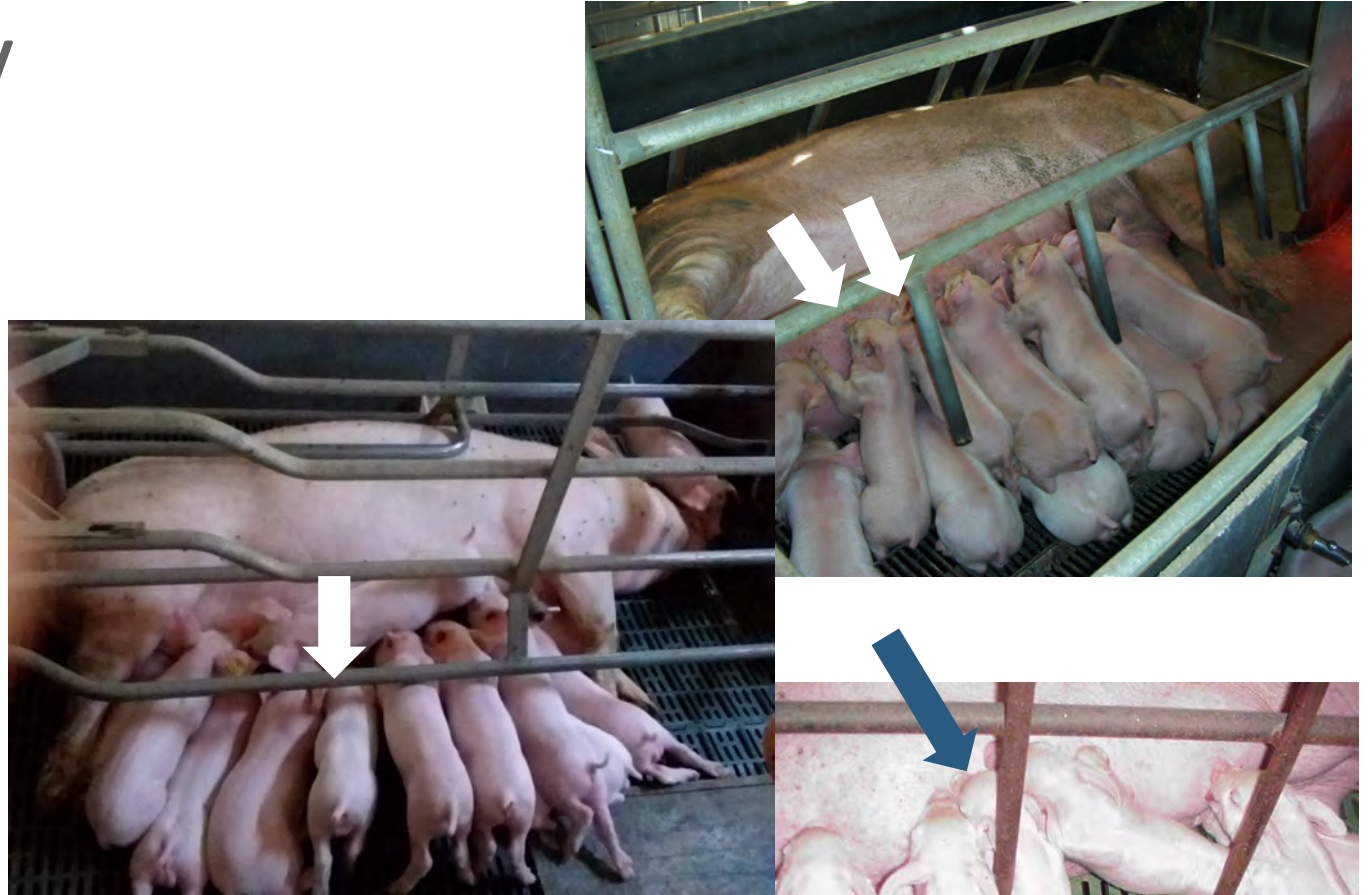


Image courtesy of Dr Carlos Gonzalez



Split suckling

- A useful technique to try and maximise colostrum intake for all piglets in a very large litter
- How?
 - By moving off the first/biggest 5-7 pigs born, with full bellies to a safe warm place.
 - Making sure you still have enough piglets still suckling to stimulate the udder
- When?
 - As close to farrowing as possible and prior to 18- 24 hours post farrowing
 - Large litters; mix of very big and very small pigs, bad udder
- Final foster?
 - ASAP after final suckle



Split suckling-the “musts”

- Move the correct pigs off the sow
- Clean and disinfect all equipment used
- Identify the pigs being split suckle.
- Be a long enough suckling period to be of value to the pigs.
- Keep the pigs not with the sow warm and comfortable.
- Have enough pigs on the sow to continue stimulating her udder
- Split suckle litters within a reasonable time after farrowing - before 18 -24 hours
- Foster pigs ASAP after split sucking management ended.



Courtesy of Dr. Carlos Gonzalez

Marking up piglets



Split suckling-What not to do.....



Making up a foster litter

- Check them, check them, check them
 - Sow Behavior
 - Piglet Behavior
 - Piglet condition
- Especially first 2 days



When shouldn't you Foster?

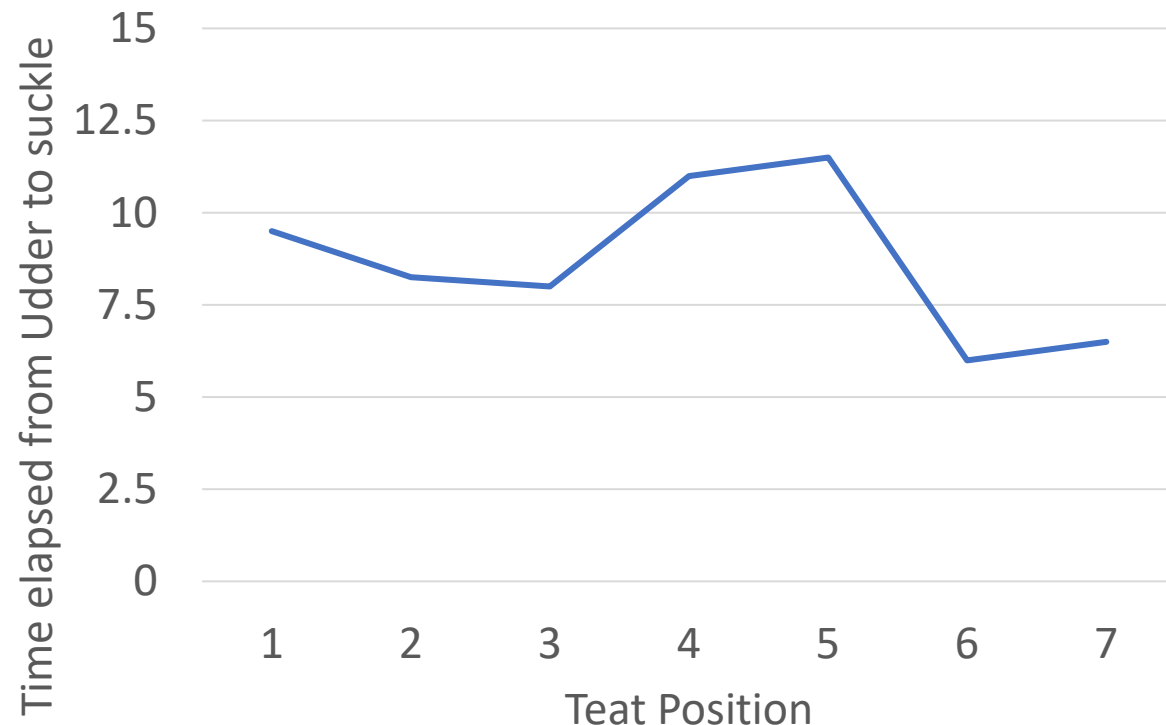
- Just because....
- To size piglets after farrowing OR just before weaning
- To have gender uniformity in litters
- Just because they are small
- Just because you've always done it for the reasons above

Unintended impacts of fostering

- When they can, piglets do better on their own mother
 - Sow produces colostrum against her specific pathogens
 - Can lead to unintended disease issues
 - Moving around too much upsets the piglets & the sows
- Timing may be off
 - Sow may have finished producing colostrum
 - Piglets have been moved before they've drunk enough colostrum
 - How much time do they need.....

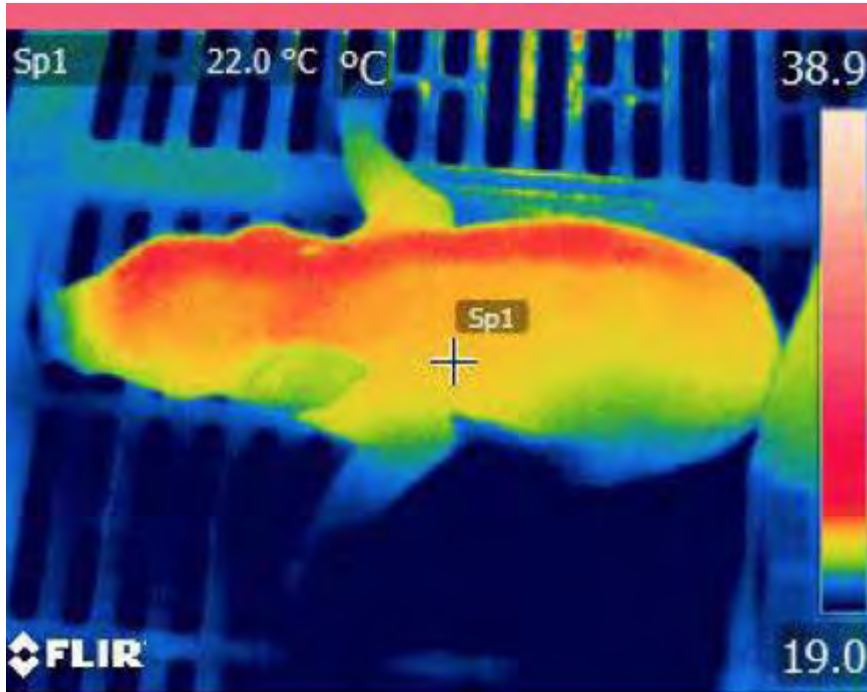
How much time do they need?

Time elapse from udder to suckle

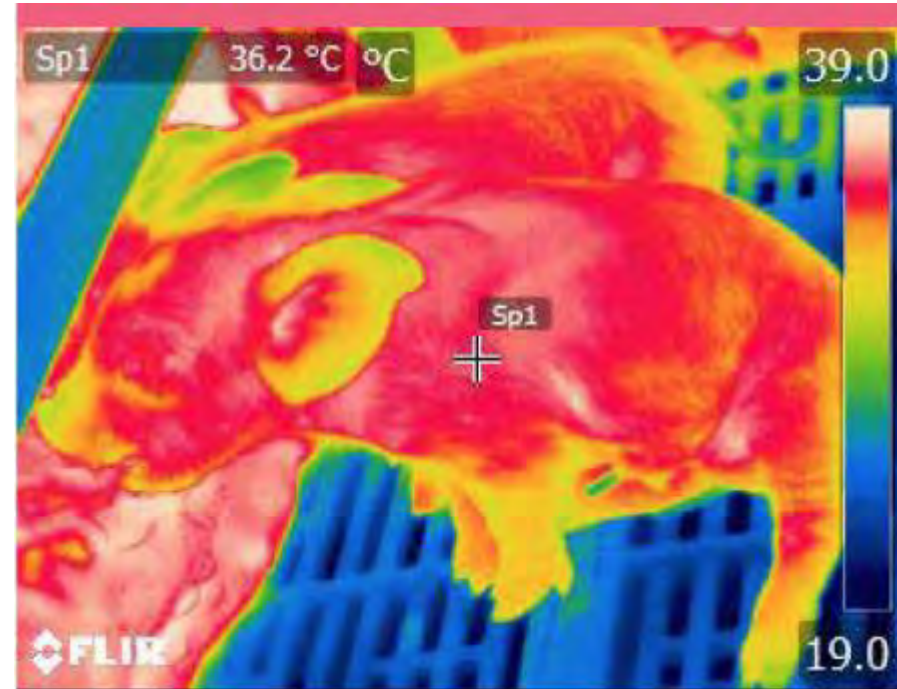


- It depends.....
 - Time elapsed shorter for front and rear teats
 - Time elapsed from birth to suckle can vary from a few seconds to nearly 3 hours
 - Even time from udder to suckle can average from nothing to over an hour
 - They need that colostrum

No Colostrum



Colostrum



Images taken by J. Alexopoulos

Common Mistakes of Fostering

- Moving pigs without colostrum intake; empty bellies.
- Moving pigs with colostrum intake, but empty bellies.
- Not matching piglet size with teat sizes; old sows-big teats-small piglets
- Not counting/recording functional teats prior fostering.
- Moving pigs to have same size together.
- Fostering once a day – at the end of the day.
- Fostering 24h or more, after birth.
- No fostering – McREBEL without major health issues.
- Fostering sick or too old pigs, to a newborn litter.
 - Too long without a teat to drink from (cold, starving, lack of antibodies)



McREBEL Fostering

- Developed in 1994 by Dr. Monte McCaw, DVM, North Carolina State University to minimise the potential negative impacts of fostering on the health of the piglets and the whole herd.
 - No fostering of piglets for grading, sexing or saving sick pigs, fall-behinds, and runts.
 - Fostering to equalize number of piglets per litter only within the first 24 hours of age. (Load sows with only the number of pigs they can successfully nurse plus one additional pig based upon their past weaning performance and udder condition).
 - Two exceptions: when a sow is sick or dies or when the sow's udder is drying up and the piglets need to be moved to a functioning teat.
 - Only move pigs w/n farrowing rooms at birth. Do not move sows or piglets b/w rooms.

McREBEL Fostering

- Stop use of nurse sows for weak-born or infected pigs, fall-behinds, and runts.
- Immediately euthanise piglets that become very sick and are unlikely to recover completely.
- Minimize handling of piglets, especially routine antibiotic or extra iron injections.
- Hold NO pigs back.
- DO NOT move fall-behind or lightweight pigs backward to younger rooms or nurse sows.
- Euthanise small piglets with poor body condition at weaning rather than holding them back



Nurse Sows

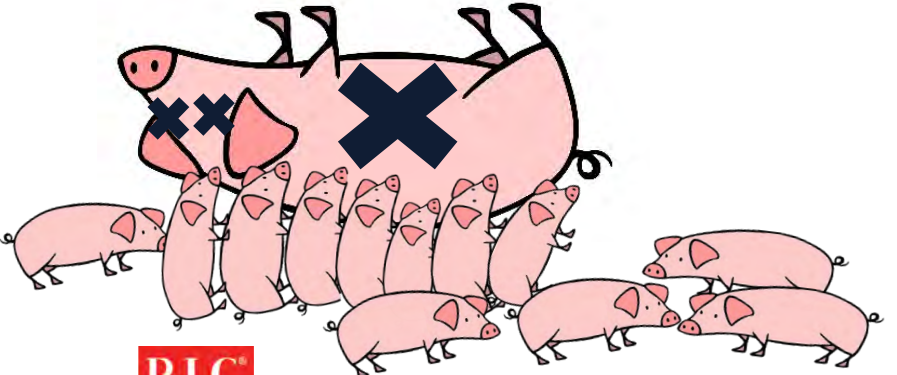
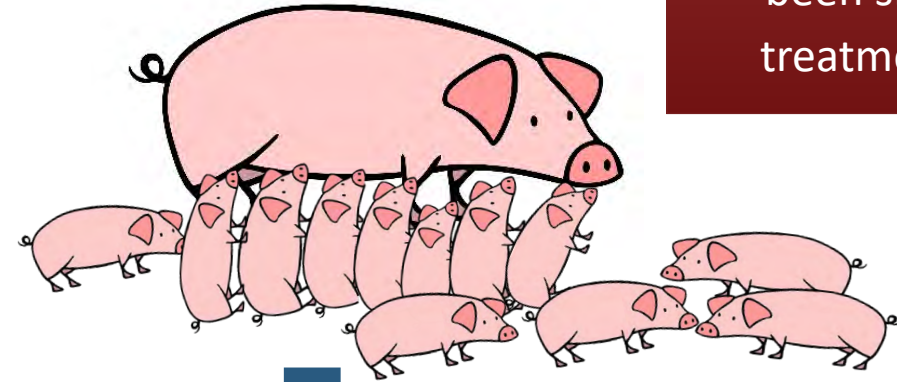
Image courtesy of Dr Carlos Gonzalez

- A sow that rears piglets/litter that are not her own
- Nurse sows should be chosen carefully
 - Between parity 1-3
 - At least 12 well-formed and functional teats
 - Well natured
 - Calm, no history of savaging or overlays
 - Good body condition
 - Looking after current litter well

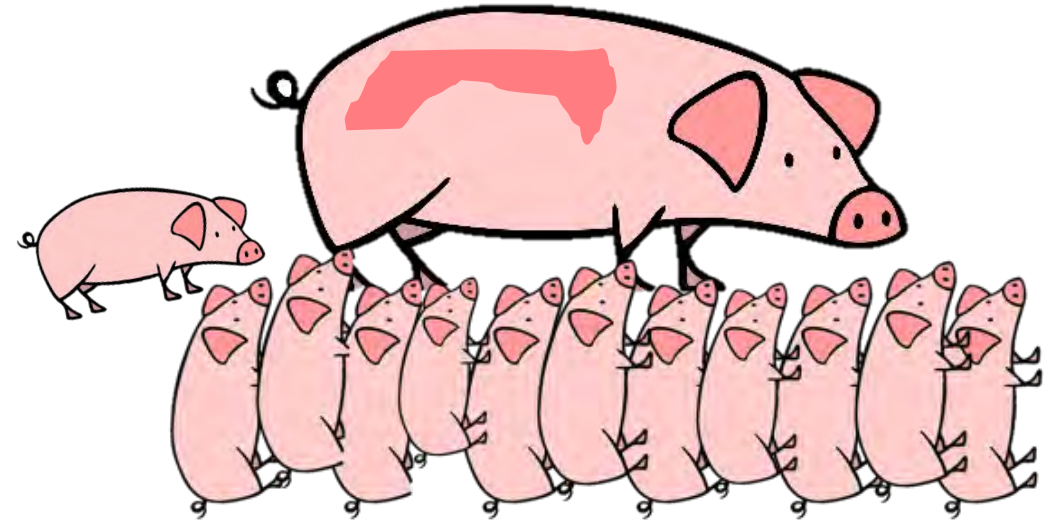


Nurse Sows-Direct Process

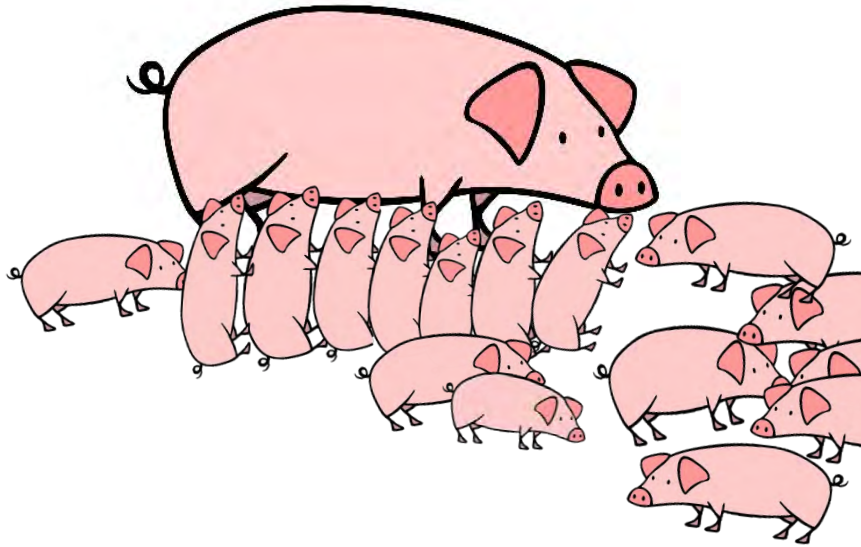
Sow A's litter is 15 DO, she has been sick for 2 days, had treatment but no change



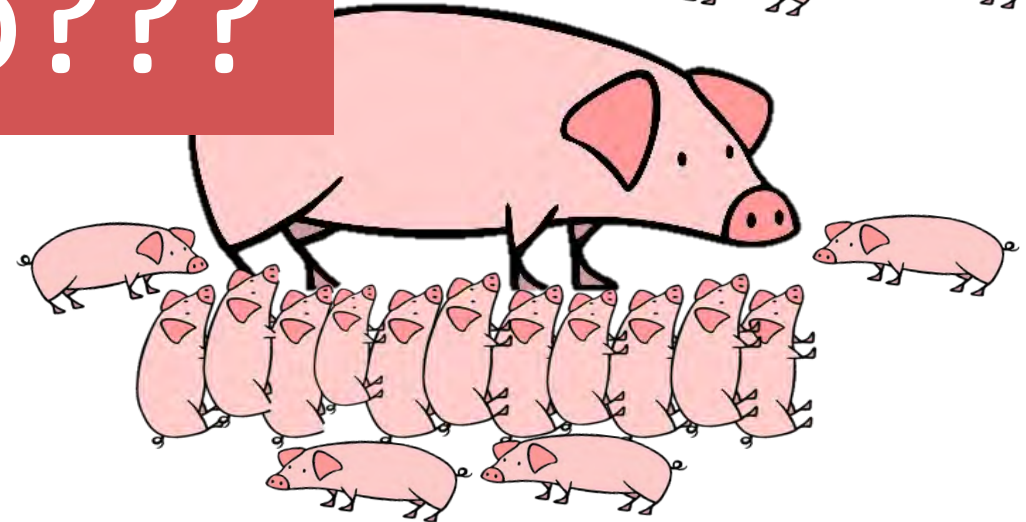
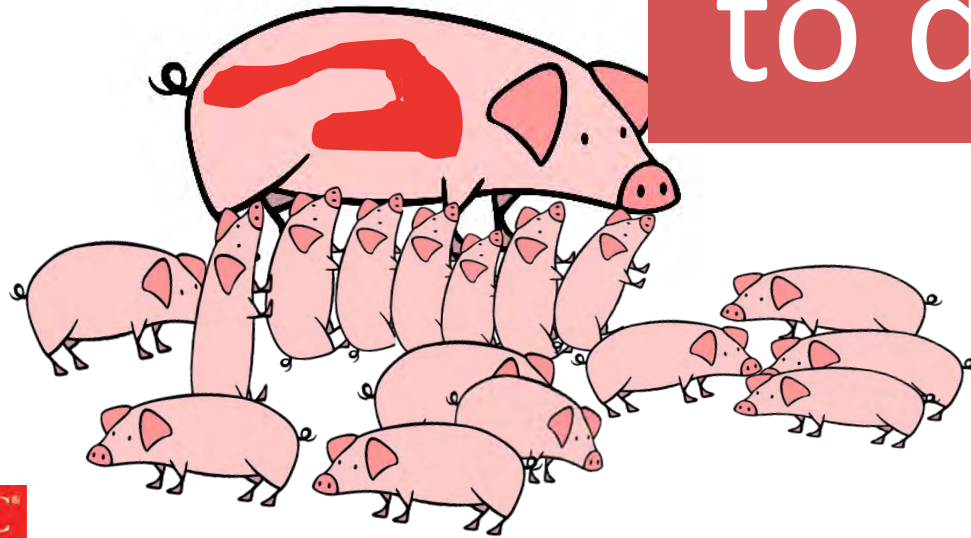
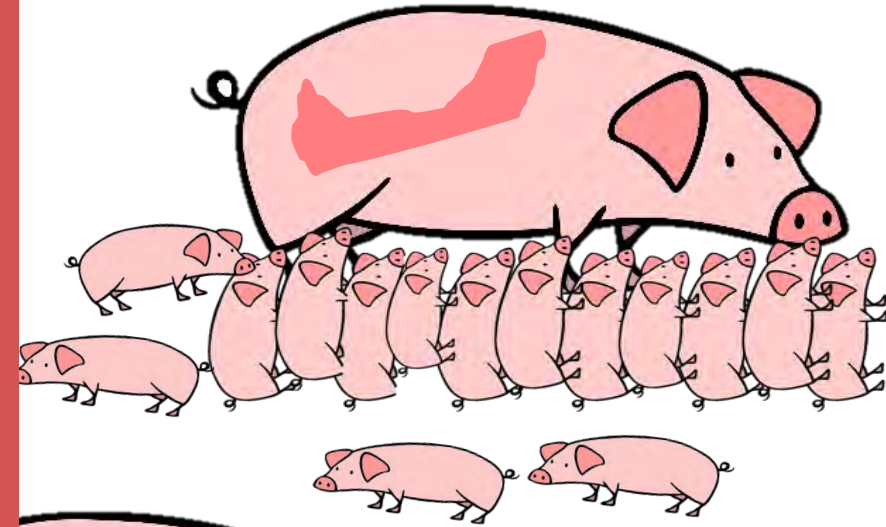
Sow B's litter is 25 days old. Good Mum



Nurse Sows-Indirect Process



What are we going to do???



The aim of Fostering is to get a piglet an ongoing drink





Questions?

