

Edited by Amy Quinn



Welcome to the August edition of our monthly newsletter.

This month saw the launch of 3 new farm apprenticeship programmes. The two of relevance to pig producers are the Level 6 Farm Technician Apprenticeship and the level 7 Farm Manager Apprenticeship. These new programmes mark an exciting stepping stone for both farms and farm staff. Allowing the next generation of farmers access to the education they want and need, while still working on farm. While these programmes can provide a career pathway for staff already working on farms and looking to upskill they also provide a pathway for school leavers or those looking for a change in career or looking to get back to employment.

In the most recent Pig Edge podcast episode, which can be found [here](#), I talk to Marcella Phelan, National Apprenticeship Programme Co-ordinator to explain all you need to know about the new programmes. The application process is bit different to other courses in that the first step is to get the host farm registered, to do this you first

register your interest to become an apprentice employer at this [link](#) after which there will be follow up steps to complete registration (including a phone call and site visit). Only after a farm is approved by SOLAS can someone apply to become an apprentice. Our advice on this is to act fast as spaces are limited. We are happy to hear that early indications show that there has been a strong interest from pig farms registering their interest to be host farms.

In other education news the Pig Development Department (PDD) are delighted that 18 students have successfully completed the Level 5 Pig Component Award Course. We were notified early this month that external authentication has been completed and the results approved, which is the final step in this programme. We look forward to awarding these students their certificates at the upcoming Teagasc Pig Farmers' Conference on October 17<sup>th</sup> (Hotel Kilmore, Cavan) and 18<sup>th</sup> (Horse and Jockey Hotel, Co. Tipperary).

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## Changes to Nitrates Regulations that you need to be aware of

Louise Clarke

Although we are only in August, it is still important that you make yourself aware of the updates to the EU Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters Regulations (often referred to as the “nitrate” regulations). The most recently updated Statutory Instrument (SI 113 of 2022) came into effect on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2022. The changes are important in calculating the volume of pig slurry or any organic manure that a farmer may use on their farm. Some of the relevant changes are outlined below.

### 1. Limit of 170 kg Organic N per hectare

The limit of 170 kg of organic N per hectare still applies to all farms that import organic fertilisers such as pig manure. The amount considered to be applied to commonage shall not exceed 50 kg of N per hectare. Now the calculation is based on not exceeding 170 kg of organic N per hectare in the current year.

### 2. Earlier closing date for spread of slurry

Article 8 (6) states that all slurry must be applied by 1<sup>st</sup> of October from 2023 onwards.

### 3. New soil testing requirements

- From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023, all farms with a grassland stocking rate above 130 kg N/ha and all arable land, **must** complete soil tests for Phosphorus (P). Without a completed soil test, a soil P **index 4 is assumed. Parcels with** Soil P index 4 **cannot** accept any organic manure

applications (except if potatoes, beet or maize are being grown).

- If the stocking rate is less than 130 kg N/ha and no soil test is done you must use a soil P index of 3
- Soils with more than 20% organic matter (often referred to as “peaty soils”) shall not exceed the P allowance for Index 3 soils
- Only parcels that are shown to be Index **1-3** are eligible to import organic manure
- Soil tests must be completed at least once every 4 years with max area per soil test of 4 hectares (9.9 acres)
- This change is very important for any farmer wishing to use pig manure

### 4. Low Emission Slurry Spreading:

Article 18 (1) (b) (v) requires low emission slurry spreading to be used for the application of the slurry produced by pigs on any holding from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023

- Low emission slurry spreading (LESS) must be used for the application of slurry produced solely by pigs on any holding.
- It is the importing farmers’ responsibility to accept the importation of organic manure onto their holding on their [agfood.ie](https://www.agfood.ie) portal once it has been uploaded by the exporting farmer.
- The closing date this year for slurry application **is 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023.**

## Soils with a P Index of 1 or 2

The availability of P in organic manures such as pig slurry is deemed to be 100% available at soil P Index of 3 or 4. If a soil is Index 1 or 2 (see Table 1) the availability of the P from organic fertilisers is 50%. The farmer can verify that the soil is Index 1 or 2 by soil sampling his farm. If a farmer does not soil test please refer to the points highlighted in section 3 above, “New soil testing requirements”.

Table 1: Phosphorus Index system remains as follows:

Soil P Index	Soil Phosphorus Ranges (mg/l)	
	Grassland – Mineral Soils	Other Crops
1	0.0 – 3.04	0.0 – 3.04
2	3.05 – 5.04	3.05 – 6.04
3	5.05 – 8.0	6.05 – 10.0
4	> 8.01	> 10.01

\*Reference SI 113 of 2022

## The importance of creep feeding

Peadar Lawlor

Virtually all pig producers in Ireland creep feed piglets in farrowing accommodation. However, a recent review by Muro et al. (2023) found that pre- and post-weaning piglet growth was improved by creep feeding in only 46% and 58%, respectively, of the studies that they examined. Based on this, one might be forgiven for thinking that the benefit from creep feeding is questionable and perhaps not even worth the effort. This would be a huge mistake! And particularly with the large litters that sows are now expected to feed.

The reality is that a multitude of factors affect creep feed consumption by individual pigs within a litter and their consequential pre and post-weaning growth. Below, I hope to outline the factors that need to be considered so that creep feeding on your farm leads to high creep feed intakes by individual pigs and subsequently to increased piglet pre- and post-weaning growth.

### Why creep feed piglets in the first place?

1. *Supplement sows' milk in late lactation.* In late lactation the pig's energy and protein requirements are not fully met by milk alone. In practice, we are very happy if our pigs average ~8kg at weaning with a pre-weaning average daily gain of ~250g/day. However, suckling pigs have potential to grow at 400-500g/day. We can capitalize on this unrealised potential (at least some of it) through effective creep feeding.
2. *Stimulate gut and digestive enzyme development*
3. *Increase piglet weaning weight*
4. *Stimulate earlier feed exploration by newly weaned pig.* Early consumption of feed after weaning can help mitigate the adverse effects of weaning stress
5. *Reduce the 'growth lag' normally observed in pigs after weaning*
6. *Increased post-weaning and lifetime growth performance in pigs*

Since our industry weans pigs at ~4 weeks of age there is huge scope for our piglets to realise the benefit from creep feeding which might not be the case where pigs are weaned at 3 weeks or less. Therefore, we should be creep feeding.

So why do some studies not find benefits from creep feeding suckling litters? Firstly, not all piglets within a litter eat creep feed and therefore, the greater the proportion of 'non-eaters' within a litter or study then the lower the likelihood that the benefits from creep feeding in terms of increased weaning weight and improved post-weaning growth will be seen. Secondly, the quantity of creep feed consumed varies greatly between litters. For this reason it is critical that we concentrate on increasing creep feed intake and the proportion of 'eaters' within each creep-fed litter so as to see greater and more consistent benefits from the practice.

**Below are some pointers towards achieving this goal.**

1. *Feed a good quality starter diet with a high milk powder content.* Both the consumption of creep feed and the proportion of eaters within a litter can be almost doubled when such a diet is fed instead of a simple vegetable-based diet. It is best to feed a good quality starter diet and this should be the same diet as that fed to pigs after weaning.
2. *Provide at least 14 days access to creep feed prior to weaning.* Where we wean piglets at 26-28 days it is recommended to commence creep feeding at 10-12 days of lactation. It is only after this that significant levels of creep feed are consumed by piglets.
3. *Feed on a 'little and often' basis* so that the creep-feed offered is always fresh but that there is always creep-feed available for piglets to eat.
4. *Always use a feeder for feeding creep feed.* A round feeder with a hopper will help keep feed fresh while allowing ad-libitum access.
5. *The creep feeder should be sited to one side of the sow's head rather than at the back or in the middle of the pen.* This enables the piglets to learn how to eat from their mothers and this simple change in feeder location has been shown to significantly increase creep feed consumption and piglet weaning weight.
6. *Provide creep feed in an 'interactive' or 'play' feeder to stimulate earlier and more frequent feed exploration.* Such feeders have been found to increase the proportion of eaters within a litter and the quantity of creep feed consumed by litters of pigs. Creating a 'play' feeder may be as simple as tying strips of ribbon to the exterior of the normal creep feeders on the unit.
7. *Provide creepfeed with a larger pellet size.* The industry has striven to produce smaller and smaller diameter pellets for pig creep and starter diets. However, at least in terms of creep feeding, it has now been shown that pellets of up to 9-12mm result in higher creep feed consumption than smaller pellets.
8. *Ensure that creep feed pellets are not too hard.* Regardless of pellet size, pellets should not be too hard as this will reduce intake. Feeding larger pellets, as in the previous point, should help in this regard as the pellets should be softer.
9. *Feed creep feed in gruel or liquid form.* This increases feed consumption, thereby increasing weaning and post-weaning weight.

## Level 5 Pig Component Award Course

The PDD have successfully completed another “Level 5 Pig Component Award Course” with external authentication completed and the results approved and so this autumn we will see certificates issued to 18 students who completed the course. The course was held in the Teagasc Portlaoise Education Centre over the last two years. Here students completed 6 modules relating to pig husbandry, welfare, nutrition, management and work practice, equipping them with the knowledge and skillset they need to work in the pig industry. We wish them well in their future endeavours in the pig industry.

## National Ploughing Championship 2023

The National Ploughing Championship 2023 is set to take place from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> of September at Ratheniska, Co Laois. As usual the PDD will be well represented in the Teagasc marquee. You will find us at Block 2 Row 21 Stand 337 where we have our largest exhibit ever, addressing all aspects of the farm family business. Make sure to call into us and say hello.

## Teagasc Pig Farmers’ Conference 2023

The Teagasc Pig Farmers’ Conference will take place on October 17<sup>th</sup> in the Hotel Kilmore, Cavan and on October 18<sup>th</sup> in the Horse and Jockey Hotel, Co. Tipperary. Preparations for this event are well underway with a great line up of speakers, both guest and from our own PDD. A full detailed line up will be made available in the coming weeks.

Make sure to mark it in your diary. We look forward to seeing you there.

## PDD at EAAP 2023

A number of PDD staff and students are presenting their latest research at the Joint International Congress on Animal Science co-organised by the European Federation of Animal Science (EAAP), the World Association for Animal production (WAAP) and Interbull in Lyon, France from August 26<sup>th</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

## AHI Survey

Animal Health Ireland (AHI) invite you to take part in an online survey on pig health and welfare management, designed for pig producers, pig farmers, managers, and integrators. In the frame of the research project DECIDE, funded by the European Union under the Horizon 2020 programme, AHI are carrying out a scientific study on different topics related to the monitoring of animal diseases and decision support for improved control of those diseases. It aims to better understand your views on the data utilisation for pig health and welfare, as well as your attitudes towards pig keeping. The duration of this survey is around 10-15mins. There are no wrong answers as they are interested in your personal opinion. The information obtained from this survey will remain confidential and anonymous. If you would like to take part in this survey, please click on the link or scan the QR code (we recommend using landscape mode if you prefer to fill out the survey using your mobile):

<https://ww2.unipark.de/uc/decidepigfarm/>. If you have any questions contact Carla Gomes ([cgomes@animalhealthireland.ie](mailto:cgomes@animalhealthireland.ie)).



**For more information:**

Please visit our webpage at:  
<https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/pigs/>

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