

Sowtel Litter Record Booklet

Instructions

Introduction

The 'Sowtel litter record booklet' is a record-keeping system that tracks events in the pig breeding herd.

It's a system that allows you to keep complete or partial records according to your needs. The booklet gives you all the inputs you need to analyse basic reproductive performance levels, which can be done manually or by computer analysis program.

An example of a record in the booklet appears on page 4 of these instructions.

Contents

Inside the front cover of the booklet there is a space for an up-to-date calendar. It helps you to easily convert dates into week numbers. Week numbers don't have to be used with the system, but it is an easier way to calculate forward events. A calendar is available from Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPIF).

On the inside pages are four headings: MATING, FARROWING, WEANING and SOW ASSESSMENT RECORD. Each of these is divided into columns to record information about these events.

The data for each sow (for this litter) is entered on one line across the page, starting with the mating event and then 16 weeks later adding her farrowing and later the weaning event. You can calculate the sow's performance by tallying the data from previous plus the current litter into the space at the end of the row and you can calculate the herd's performance by adding and averaging the columns.

Inside the back cover are notes to help you use the booklet and to understand the terms and abbreviations. Also included is a breeding table to calculate expected return dates and farrowing dates.

Starting the records - mating

To start the system, record only matings for the first 16 weeks (the gestation period of 114 days). Don't use the FARROWING or WEANING columns during this period. Sows that farrow or wean during the initial period are not recorded in the booklet until their next mating. Write these down elsewhere and later combine the details with current results to get updated sow assessments.

On the first day of mating, find the week number using the calendar inside the front cover and add 16 weeks to pinpoint the week when the sow will farrow. For example, a sow mated in week 17 is due to farrow in week 33 (17 plus 16). A sow mated in week 42 is expected to farrow in week 6 the next year. This is because there are only 10 weeks left in the current year (52 less 42) and the remaining six are in the new year.

It's worth noting that sometimes there are 53 numbered weeks in a year (if 31/12 is on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, then this is part of Week 1 of the new year; if 31/12 is on a Thursday, then this becomes Week 53; if 31/12 is on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, then this is Week 52 of the old year). However, you may prefer to use the dates instead of week numbers. When you've calculated the week the sow is due to farrow, enter it in the 'week due' column. Try to keep matings in the correct order of mating dates down the column.

If you run sows or gilts outdoors with a boar and don't always see the matings, just record the date (or week number) when the sows were put with the boar. Assume that mating happened within a week or two. It's not accurate but at least there is a date in the book can be used as a guide to the expected return or farrowing.

Farrowing and weaning

After 16 weeks the first sow whose mating was noted should farrow. Record her farrowing date

and details in the FARROWING columns, along the same line as her mating entry. Enter the birth details of other sows down the columns as they farrow.

In four to six weeks (the weaning age for your herd) the first sow will be weaned. Record the weaning date and details in the WEANING columns.

Litter totals and averages

At weaning time, complete the SOW ASSESSMENT RECORD. In the case of a first litter, just transfer the results across from the FARROWING and WEANING columns. Where there are previous litters add on the results of these litters to the present one and calculate the averages.

You can also calculate the farrowing interval (Farr int wks) that is, the weeks between the last farrowing and this one. This is a useful fertility check.

The next mating

Three to five days after weaning, the sow should come into season and be mated again. This starts the cycle again and you record the mating details on a new line in the MATING column together with the week and date due.

Also at this time, under SOW ASSESSMENT RECORD, jot down the last farrowing week (Last farr wk) from the previous litter. This helps you locate the previous litter's results for reference.

Returns to service

If a sow returns to service three weeks after mating and is re-mated, put a line through the record of the first mating and write RETURN in this row.

Record the re-mating on a new line. Make a note such as 'R1' (first return) in the 'Comment' column. Decide how many returns you will allow before culling the sow.

By starting a new line each time a sow returns to service, you get some idea of the infertility in the

herd from the number of abandoned lines on each page.

Checking herd performance

When you complete a page of records, tally the columns. By dividing the totals by the number of farrowings on the page, you can calculate averages for:

- number of piglets born alive per litter
- number of piglets weaned per litter
- mortality rate from live births to weaning.

These are efficiency factors to compare with targets that you have set to achieve.

Assessing your sows

You'll have to make a decision about a sow's future at some stage of her reproductive cycle. You can use the SOW ASSESSMENT RECORD columns in the booklet to help make this decision, based on the sow's performance to date. If this section is up to date, it will show the number of litters she has had, the total pigs she has produced and weaned and the average number of piglets born and weaned per litter.

You should also consider other factors such as age, leg weakness and milking ability when deciding whether to cull a sow or keep her.

If the sow is culled, it is useful to record the reason, using the codes inside the back cover of the book. This helps to point out problem areas.

Periodic assessment

Analysis of the data will show if herd performance is good, average or needs improving and whether there is a change or not compared with previous periods.

There is space and the formulae at the bottom of each page to calculate some averages such as farrowing rate and pre-weaning mortality.

For analysis over a standard length of time, say every three months (six monthly if a few sows, weekly if many), the totals from the each page in the selected time period can be added on a

separate sheet and the reproductive performance levels calculated and compared with those of previous periods or with targets. Formulae for the calculations can be found in the QPIF article 'Pig industry terms and definitions'. Data from the booklet can also be analysed by computer programs.

To compare your results with herd industry standards, see the QPIF article 'Pig herd performance standards', participate in group recording services or visit websites such as Australian Pork Limited (www.australianpork.com.au) - see Australian Pig Annual.

Order your Sowtel booklet or cards

To order the Sowtel booklet and packs of individual sow cards, contact:

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Further information

Refer to the following pages on the QPIF website (www.dpi.qld.gov.au):

- 'Pig industry terms and definitions'
- 'Pig herd performance standards'

If you require further information about pigs:

- Visit the QPIF website www.dpi.qld.gov.au
- Contact the QPIF Business Information Centre – 8 am – 5 pm Monday-Friday (telephone 13 25 23 for the cost of a local call within Queensland; interstate callers 07 3404 6999)
- Email callweb@dpi.qld.gov.au

Example page from 'Sowtel litter record booklet'

An example from the 'Sowtel litter record booklet' appears on the following page.

