

## **Workshop 1: Mortality and Welfare in the Farrowing Unit**

The aim of the workshop was to identify potentials and focus areas for further improvement of piglet survival and welfare of sow and piglets in the farrowing unit based on the following challenges:

- In farrowing sections with traditional farrowing crates sows have reduced space and reduced possibilities to express maternal behaviour including nest building
- Impaired welfare for nursing sows and their piglets
- Need for increasing the survival rate and growth for piglets

The workshop presentations and discussions showed that different countries are doing research in relation to the challenges. No one has the final answer to the challenges but various research projects have different proposals to solve the challenges. Most of the proposals are only relevant when building new stables.

A possible way to improve the sow's possibilities to express maternal behaviour is loose housing of sows. Strategic use of straw at farrowing (providing of 15-20 kg of straw 2 days before expected farrowing) would make it possible for sows to do nest building. A precondition for strategic use of straw is a good manure system in the barn and this needs to be taken into consideration when building new pig barns. A group housing system for sows and their litters provides a more complex environment with more possibilities to express natural behaviour.

The impaired welfare of nursing sows compared to ordinary sows may be improved by loose housing. Selection for fewer piglets would decrease the need for nursing sows.

Temporary confinement of otherwise loose housed sows may reduce crushing of piglets at birth but may increase the rate of still births. This is compared to loose housed sows. Another way to increase the survival rate for piglets may be an increased focus on the week piglets. Extra care such as adding extra heat at birth for small and unviable piglets can increase survival rates. In Sweden strategic use of straw at farrowing has shown to decrease the number of stillborn piglets.

The majority of the participants agreed that the final goal should be loose housing of sows. However, there was some disagreement on how we should reach this goal.