

## How to Monitor and Assist Difficult Farrowing

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### What is Difficult Farrowing?

Farrowing is the process of giving birth to piglets. Any condition that interferes with the normal process of giving birth can result in a difficult farrowing.

### What conditions are associated with a difficult farrowing?

- Long labor (taking too long to deliver a piglet)
- Over conditioned female (fat sow or gilt)
- Interruptions in the process of giving birth
- Piglet not in the correct position
- Piglet stuck in the birth canal

### How to monitor farrowing

A sow or gilt generally begins the process of giving birth by “nesting”. She will exhibit restless behavior and will pretend to build a nest if given materials like straw. About a day before or the day that she is giving birth, the sow or gilt will usually not eat much food (if any). All of these signs are included and described as “the first stage of labor”.

The second stage of labor is the actual pushing of pigs out of the birth canal. This process can take up to 2-3 hours. In general, the fluid from the uterus is released out of the birth canal (breaking of the membrane sac) and piglets are pushed down the birth canal. Most piglets are delivered every 15-20 minutes, but can occur faster or slower. If the interval between piglets is longer than 30-45 minutes, then the sow or gilt needs to be evaluated to see if she is having difficulty having her piglets.



### Assisting with a difficult farrowing

It is important to know that piglets are delivered coming forwards or backwards and from either horn of the uterus. This will help you when you decide to assist in delivery of a piglet.

Step 1: Determine if the sow or gilt is taking too long to deliver a piglet

Step 2: Determine if there is a piglet in the birth canal

- The vulva needs to be properly cleaned with a mild detergent and water
- Decide if your arm will fit into the birth canal and not do damage to the sow or gilt, in particular
- Use a shoulder length sleeve and generous amounts of lubricant
- Cup your fingers together to form a cone with your hand prior to entering the birth canal
- Gently insert your hand into the lips of the vulva into birth canal
- Decide if you can continue to insert your hand into the birth canal and see if a piglet is present

Step 3: Determine if the piglet can be delivered

- Determine if the piglet size is normal and can come out the birth canal
- Decide if the feet or head belongs to only one piglet
- Decide if the feet or head can be grasped by your hand
- Decide if you will need to use a device (snare) to assist in delivering the piglet

Step 4: Deliver the piglet (s)

- Grasp the piglet's feet with your fingers above the knees or hocks
- Grasp the piglet's head with your index and middle finger (behind the ears)
- Gently pull the piglet towards you through the birth canal and out the vulva lips
- Break the umbilical cord by pulling the piglet away from the sow and trying to leave it at least 3 inches long
- Clean the membranes off of the nose and mouth so that the piglet can breathe easily



If piglets cannot be felt in the birth canal or the female appears to be in extreme discomfort, the herd veterinarian needs to be contacted. Accurate decisions as to what is going on and what to do is critical in maintaining the longevity of the gilt or sow in the herd.