Evaporative snout cooling system on the performance of lactating sows and their litters in a subtropical region

Sistema de resfriamento adiabático evaporativo conduzido por ductos no desempenho de fêmeas suínas em lactação e suas leitegadas

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to evaluate the influence of different temperature control systems on the voluntary feed intake (VFI), percentage of weight loss (PWL) and performance of lactating sows as well as on the weight of their piglets. Two systems were used: traditional temperature control system (TTCS) with curtain management and an evaporative snout cooling system (ESCS). The study was performed during the summer of 2011. After farrowing and at the weaning, 241 sows were weighed to evaluate the PWL during lactation. TTCS sows lost more weight (5.3±0.9%; P<0.05) than ESCS sows (2.2±0.9%). VFI was measured at intervals of four days in 32 primiparous and 39 multiparous sows. ESCS sows had higher VFI (5.8±0.2kg day-1; P<0.05) than TTCS sows (4.8±0.2kg day-1). Primiparous sows (4.4±0.2kg day-1) had lower VFI than multiparous sows (6.3±0.2kg day-1, P<0.05) regardless of the temperature control system. Primiparous sows in the TTCS (10.9±1.3 days) had longer weaning-to-oestrus interval than primiparous sows in the ESCS (7.0±1.2 days, P<0.05). Subsequent litter size tended to be higher (P=0.095) in ESCS than in TTCS (12.0±0.5 and 10.9±0.6 piglets born, respectively). Litters housed in ESCS were heavier (65.3±1.4kg; P<0.05) at weaning than litters in TTCS (60.7±1.4kg). The results suggest that in general sows and piglets housed in the ESCS have better performance than sows and piglets housed in TTCS.

Key words: heat stress, piglet; weight, evaporative snout cooling system, temperature control, voluntary feed intake.

INTRODUCTION

Subtropical regions have approximately six months of heat, with temperature often exceeding 30°C. This elevated temperature is far from the Thermal Comfort Zone (TCZ) of sows, which is between 12 and 22°C (BLOEMHOF et al., 2008). When environmental temperature is above the TCZ, reproductive and productive performance
of sows may be impaired. High temperatures can cause direct and indirect consequences on herd performance, as pronounced decrease in voluntary feed intake (VFI), with consequent loss of body weight (QUINIOU & NOBLET, 1999), increase in water intake (RENAUDEAU et al., 2003b), decrease in milk production (QUINIOU & NOBLET, 1999), failures in subsequent reproductive performance of sows (THAKER & BILKEI, 2005), increase piglet mortality by crushing and decrease piglet weight gain (MARTINS et al., 2008).

Production losses due to heat stress can be avoided by using some systems created to minimize the effects of high environmental temperature. For that purpose, there are systems of forced ventilation using fans (TOLON & NÄAS, 2005), evaporative snout cooling system (TOLON & NÄAS, 2005) and also with drip systems (BARBARI & CONTI, 2009). However, the information concerning the performance of sows from different parities, when exposed to these systems, is scarce in regions of subtropical climate.

This study aimed to compare the influence of a traditional temperature control system (TTCS) that is widely used in subtropical productions systems, with an evaporative snout cooling system (ESCS), which lead cold air on sows' neck through ducts, on body temperature, VFI and percentage of weight loss (PWL) during lactation, and subsequent reproductive performance of sows as well as the weight gain of their litters.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was performed in a pig farm with 5500 sows located in Santa Catarina state, Brazil (26°22'13" south and 50°08'40" west). The climate in this region is subtropical and the trial was conducted during summer, in January and February of 2011. Pluviometric precipitation, average of relative humidity (RH) and variation of environmental temperature during the period of the study were 244.5mm, 83.1% and 17.6 to 27.4°C, respectively. A total of 249 during the period of the study were 244.5mm, 83.1% and variation of environmental temperature during summer, in January and February of 2011.

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VFI started immediately after birth. The automatic feeders in the crates had a reservoir with capacity for approximately 8kg of feed. The reservoir was filled manually, twice a day (at 7:00 a.m. and at 16:00 p.m). The amount of feed consumed and feed refusal were measured considering the amount of each 4 days (on days 4, 8, 12 and 16 of lactation). Between 12 and 36h after birth, piglets were tattooed and cross-fostered taking into account similar weights. Piglets were weighed at birth, after cross-fostering and at weaning (20.2±0.1 days of lactation). Piglets had no access to creep feed until weaning.

Rectal temperature (RT) of 24 females was monitored during the lactation period (12 sows in each system). The measurement was performed daily between 16:00 and 17:00 p.m., with a digital thermometer. Subsequent reproductive performance of all sows was evaluated and the following data were collected: weaning-to-oestrus interval (WOI), farrowing rate (FR), and the number of total piglets born (NTB).

The environmental temperature inside the rooms was measured with maximum and minimum thermometers Incoterm® (DotDigital, Canela, RS, Brazil) daily in the morning (at 8:00), noon (12:30) and afternooon (17:00). The RH was measured with a digital thermohygrometer Incoterm® (DotDigital, Canela, RS, Brazil).

All statistical analyses were performed using SAS software (SAS, 2005). RT and VFI were analysed as repeated measures using the MIXED procedure with a model containing fixed effects of treatment, parity order, day of lactation and the interaction between these factors. PWL during lactation, WOI, piglet weight and the number of piglets at weaning were also analysed using the MIXED procedure. The models contained fixed effects of treatment, parity order and the interaction between these two factors. For litter weight analysis the litter was considered the experimental unit. Litter weight at cross-fostering and the number of piglets at cross-fostering were used as covariates in the analyses of litter weight and number of weaned piglets, respectively. For temperature and RH data, the analysis was performed using the MIXED procedure for repeated measures. The model included fixed effects of treatments, the time of the

**Figure 1** - Evaporative snout cooling system design and technological parameters. Inside the evaporative cooling pads area there is water flowing over the surface of the pad and it is responsible to turn the air that passes through the evaporative cooling pads in a cooled air. Due negative pressure, cooled air is into a curtain-like plastic duct and conducted to the interior of the farrowing rooms. Inside of the facilities, this duct is split on terminal individual ducts ending just above each farrowing crate, through which the air reaches the sow’s neck region.
day and the interaction between these two factors. The experimental period was included as a random effect in all the models of analysis. LSMeans were compared by Tukey-Kramer, considering the level of 5% as significant and between 5 and 10% as a trend. Data are presented as means ± standard error of mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sows of both systems were exposed to temperatures above the TCZ, but RT was higher in traditional temperature control system (TTCS) (P<0.05) almost all entire period (Figure 2). In accord with these results other studies showed the same pattern (RENAUDEAU et al., 2003b; WILLIAMS et al., 2013).

Voluntary feed intake (VFI) was not affected (P>0.05) by the interactions between treatment, parity order and day of lactation. VFI was lower (P<0.05) in TTCS sows (Table 1). There was a gradual increase in VFI over the lactational period (P<0.05) which is also observed in other studies (MOSNIER et al., 2010ab; WILLIAMS et al., 2013). This pattern can be explained by a gastrointestinal limitation of sows, due to the feed restriction during the gestational phase, also by the fact that digestive tract needs time to adapt to an ad libitum feed offer (EISSEN et al., 2000) and can be related to the insulin resistance in primiparous sows or to the insulin-glucose ratio in multiparous sows (MOSNIER et al., 2010ab) at the beginning of lactation. Primiparous sows had lower (P<0.05) VFI than multiparous sows, regardless of the temperature control system used (Table 1).

Lower VFI observed in TTCS sows agrees with the negative effect of increasing temperature on sows VFI (QUINIOU & NOBLET, 1999; RENAUEAU et al., 2003a; WILLIAMS et al., 2013).

According to BLACK et al. (1993), VFI decreases 0.17kg per each increase of 1°C in the environmental temperature, when it is above 16°C. Despite the fact that there was no difference between the two systems in the temperature inside the rooms (25.8±0.3°C vs. 26.1±0.3°C; P>0.05; TTCS vs. ESCS, respectively), the lower body temperature of evaporative snout cooling system (ESCS) sows probably explains their higher VFI. Sows probably reduce their VFI in an attempt to decrease internal heat production (WILLIAMS et al., 2013). In addition to their gastrointestinal limitation (EISSEN et al., 2000), primiparous sows are more sensitive to high temperature compared to multiparous sows (BLACK et al., 1993).

PWL was not affected (P>0.05) by the interaction between treatment and parity order. The higher PWL in TTCS sows (5.3±0.7% versus 2.2±0.7%; P<0.001) agrees with results of another study in which sows exposed to high temperatures lost more weight (QUINIOU & NOBLET, 1999). Weight loss during lactation is common, mainly in hiperprolific sows, because VFI is not sufficient to attend the energetic demands for maintenance and milk production (EISSEN et al., 2003), and a mobilization of the body reserves is needed to fulfill the demands for milk production (KIM & EASTER, 2001).

The number of piglets and litter weighted at cross-fostering were similar among systems (12.8±0.1 piglets per sow and 18.5±0.5kg, respectively). There was no difference (P>0.05) in the number of weaned piglets between systems or parity order classes (Table 2). The better growth performance of ESCS piglets confirms previous observations that heat

![Figure 2 - Effect of temperature control systems on the rectal temperature of sows during lactation. TTCS = traditional temperature control system (n=12). ESCS = evaporative snout cooling system (n=12). * Indicate statistical difference between the systems (P<0.05).](image-url)
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Table 2 – Number of weaned piglets and litter weight at weaning according to the temperature control system and the parity order of sows (LSmeans±SEM) and weaning-to-oestrus interval (WOI), farrowing rate (FR) and total number of piglets born (NTB) according to the temperature control system (LSmeans±SEM).

| Variables                      | TTCS     | N | ESCS     | N | Primiparous | N | Multiparous | N |
|--------------------------------|----------|---|----------|---|-------------|---|-------------|---|
| Piglets weaned/sow             | 11.5±0.27| 36| 11.7±0.27| 35| 11.8±0.28   | 32| 11.4±0.26   | 39|
| Litter weight at weaning, kg   | 60.7±1.40a| 36| 65.3±1.43b| 35| 61.6±1.52   | 32| 64.4±1.33   | 39|
| WOI - Primiparous sows, days   | 10.9±1.3cx| 27| 7.1±1.2d  | 26| -           | - | -           | - |
| WOI - Multiparous sows, days   | 4.7±0.7y  | 81| 5.0±0.7   | 80| -           | - | -           | - |
| FR, %                          | 79.0      | 105| 80.7     | 109| -           | - | -           | - |
| NTB                            | 10.9±0.6e | 88| 12.0±0.5f | 83| -           | - | -           | - |

a, b in the same row indicate statistical differences (P<0.05).

c, d in the same row indicate statistical differences (P<0.05).

e, f in the same row indicate a tendency to be statistically different (P=0.095).

TTCS = traditional temperature control system.

ESCS = evaporative snout cooling system.

WOI = weaning-to-oestrus interval.

FR = farrowing rate.

NTB = total piglets born.

A beneficial effect of this system on reducing the weaning-to-oestrus interval occurs in primiparous but not in multiparous sows.

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