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### **Sow aggression: The cocktail party approach**

*Group size is one of several tactics for reducing aggression in group gestation pens*

Pipestone, Minn. [March 24, 2016] – If you're considering a renovation or rebuild of your sow facility, you're probably wondering whether to make the switch to group housing. As you consider your options, don't let the threat of sow aggression keep you from getting the benefits of group housing.

A number of factors – including group size, pen design and tools to manage individuals within groups – can support sow productivity and minimize aggression, says Brad Carson, sales representative for Nedap U.S.



If left unchecked, sow aggression can result in lesions, bite wounds and stress and can negatively impact production potential. However, aggression can be managed in sow groups, and – despite misconceptions – a decline in production is not a given in group housing.

#### **Cocktail parties and group size**

"When evaluating group sizes and the challenges that can be associated with introducing a new sow or gilt into a group, consider what happens at cocktail parties," says Carson.

Think about the moment the door opens and you enter a room full of strangers. If it's a big party in a banquet hall, you might find a quiet space to assess the situation and get a feel for the group. Who looks friendly? Where is an open spot to join a group? In a large room filled with a large – but not too crowded – group, you could make this kind of assessment with little interaction and minimal anxiety, therefore reducing the risk of an aggressive social interaction.

On the other hand, if you walk into an intimate party in someone's living room, you are likely to need to engage socially as soon as the door opens. If you enter the party too boldly or loudly, the whole group could quickly become nervous.

"It's the same way for sows," says Carson. "If you've got four or five sows in a small pen, and a new one walks in, they're probably going to fight. If you have 100 sows in a large, well-designed pen, they're not going to see or notice that new sow, and they are much less likely to fight."

#### **More tips to minimize aggression**

In addition to group size, other factors can be used to manage aggression.

**Traffic:** The traffic flow in and out of the feeding stations can impact aggression. A best practice is to ensure sows exiting the feeding stations cannot immediately return to the entrances. Research studies have shown that farms that allow repeated immediate access to feeding stations report more lesions on sows.<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> van der Peet-Schwering, Carola, Anita Hoofs, Nicoline Soede, Hans Spoolder, and Pieter Vereijken. "Group Housing of Sows in Early Pregnancy." *Livestock Science* 2009.125 (2009): 1-14. Print.

**Laying areas:** The design of laying or resting areas within group pens can also help to minimize aggression. Allowing enough depth to break up lines of sight can help to reduce the amount of fighting between sows.

Typically the most aggressive sows are not the oldest or biggest sows, they are the ones that have been in the group the longest.

“In poorly designed pens, new sows coming into a group have no means of staying out of the line of sight of those boss sows,” Carson says. “Pens with well-designed laying areas can allow for smoother adjustments when new sows enter groups.”

### **Individual management**

Outside of managing sow aggression, another opportunity to maximize productivity is implementing electronic sow feeding (ESF).

“ESF gives producers the means to track a sow’s feed consumption and adjust her feeding rate based on her how she is performing,” says Carson. This supports return on investment by maximizing productivity and minimizing waste.

“If we use large pens, design the flow to manage sow aggression and feed each individual sow in a group environment, the chances of experiencing losses in production are significantly minimized,” says Carson.

For more information on swine housing and management or to learn more about Nedap technologies, visit [www.nedap.com/sowmanagement](http://www.nedap.com/sowmanagement) or contact Brad Carson at 507-820-2501 or [Brad.Carson@Nedap.com](mailto:Brad.Carson@Nedap.com).

Nedap is a global leader in livestock equipment and management systems. With a goal of creating technology that matters, Nedap has developed, manufactured and sold intelligent technological solutions for swine management for more than 35 years. Nedap is focused on both herd productivity and performance worldwide, offering smart, sustainable solutions in all parts of the production cycle for a profitable, individual approach to managing swine in large groups.

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### **Suggested cutlines:**

**Nedap - Group Housing Image 2:** *A best practice in minimizing aggression in group housing is to prevent sows that are exiting the feeding stations from immediately returning to the entrances. Learn more about solutions for group housing at <http://www.nedap.com/sowmanagement>.*

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