

MISTING AND SWINE

When the hot weather hits, eating a big meal is the last thing on anyone's mind. With temperatures in the 30s and 40s, pigs are probably too busy dreaming of a distant mud puddle to worry about their next meal.

The growth performance of animals is often affected by extreme environmental conditions. In the case of swine, generally a cold environment will increase feed intake as the pig strives to maintain body temperature, while warmer environments may reduce growth, increase body maintenance demands, and subject the animal to environmental stress.

All animals have a thermoneutral zone, the range of temperatures at which they are most comfortable and their body temperature remains constant. Summertime temperatures often exceed the thermoneutral zone for pigs. Since air conditioning is much too expensive to be a practical consideration, spraying pigs with water is one option that can help to reduce stress.

Past research has proven that high environmental temperatures (>25°C) adversely affect feed intake and subsequent performance. As temperatures rise, physiological changes in the pig also occur, including increases in rectal temperatures, respiration rates and pulse rates. Appreciating the physiological response of the pig at high temperatures provides additional insight into ways to minimize misting, and therefore water usage. Researchers theorize that misting may only be necessary during those events that are most likely to raise the pig's body temperature, like during a meal.

Misting has proven to be an effective method to reduce heat stress during peak summertime temperatures in swine facilities. Using misting or sprinkling to wet down pigs directly improves evaporative cooling efficiency since the process occurs at the skin's surface, rather than trying to cool down the pig indirectly by cooling the air. Think of how much cooler it feels when you step out of a pool on a breezy day. The same concept applies to evaporative cooling for pigs.

Researchers have clearly demonstrated that it is essential to consider both the physiology of the pig as well as the housing constraints when using misting as a strategy to improve performance during hot weather. They assessed the impact of synchronizing misting and meals on feed intake and meal duration. The experiment studied eighty 70 kg crossbred grower-finisher pigs (all barrows) for 30 days to observe the effect that misting, synchronized with meals, had on performance.



Three misting strategies were compared: 1) misting just prior to a meal, 2) misting between meals and 3) no misting. The air was held at 30°C and 50% relative humidity. The assessment was based on two variables, feed intake and meal duration. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Treatment	Feed intake (Kg)	Meal duration (h)
No mist	0.623	0.233 = 14 min.
Prior to meal	0.701	0.263 = 16 min.
Between meals	0.619	0.210 = 13 min.

Table 1.
Effect of misting on feed intake and meal duration of grower-finisher pigs.

CONSIDERATIONS

Pigs misted just prior to a meal had significantly greater feed intake (13%) and ate significantly longer (19%) compared to the pigs on the other treatments. The effects appear to be the result of cooling the pig, therefore reducing the temperature spike that normally occurs during an activity, such as a meal. This moderation of the body temperature seems to allow the pig to eat for a greater length of time before thermoregulatory controls restrict the meal duration and, as a result, the amount consumed.

While the short length of the present experiment did not allow an assessment of the whole grow-finish phase, the researchers suggested that increased feed intake should benefit growth performance over the long term.

FEED INTAKE + 13%
Better Growth Performance