

Group suckling in organic sow units

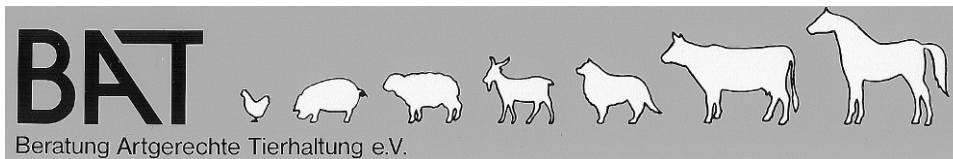
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**16th IFOAM Organic World Congress,
Modena, Italy, June 16-20, 2008**



Group housing of lactating sows

- > **Study on 31 farms in Switzerland, Germany and Austria**
- > **Aim of the study: description of the status quo of group suckling in organic farms and the identification of success factors on farm level**



The project was sponsored by the Federal Organic Farming Scene, Germany.

Group suckling – an animal friendly and economic system

Advantages

- > Natural behavior
- > Less farrowing pens needed
- > Integration in old buildings
- > Possible for outdoor climate stable
- > efficient use and acceptability of the areas
- > Less stress for the piglets during weaning – no grouping
- > More space – more activity
- > Higher feed intake

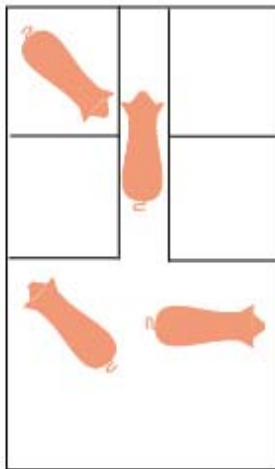
Disadvantages

- > Higher demand in management
- > Difficult to control the animals
- > One additional transfer and cleaning
- > Increase of weight differences between piglets

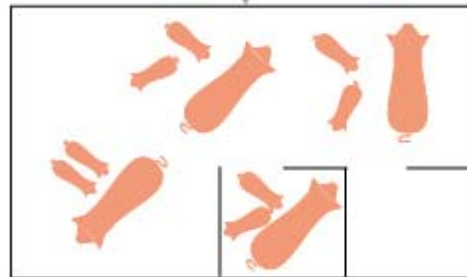
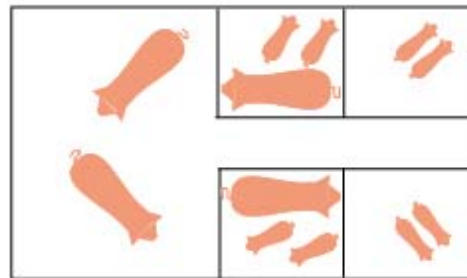
Group housing of lactating sows

Group housing without changing the stable

Single system

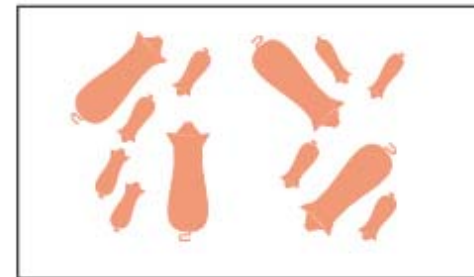
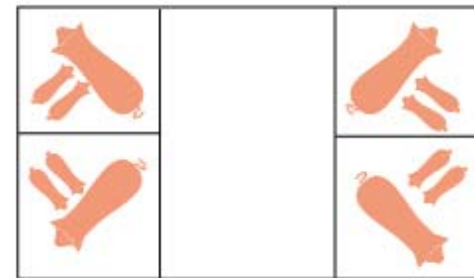


Modified single system



Combination of single and group housing

Two stables



Methods: Success factors

- > Health of sows and piglets
- > homogeneity in piglet's weight at weaning
- > normal behavior of the sows at handling
- > productivity data (amount of weaned piglets per litter, losses in farrowing and group housing pen)

Methods: Evaluation of farms

Target values were defined in the areas

- > housing
- > management
- > feeding
- > animal health
- > human-animal relationship
- > productivity

Methods: Development of scoring system

Farm	Pen design	Pigletnest	Outdoor run	Feeding	Management	Animal Health	Productivity	Human-Animal Relation	Skin lesions, BCS, Behaviour
1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2
2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	1	3	2	2	.	2	.	2	2
4	2	2	1	1	2	3	2	3	2
5	1	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	2
6	3	3	2	2	1	3	2	2	1
7	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	2
8	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	2
9	1	1	2	3	3	3	3	2	2
10	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	.	1

1 = good

2 = mid

3 = bad

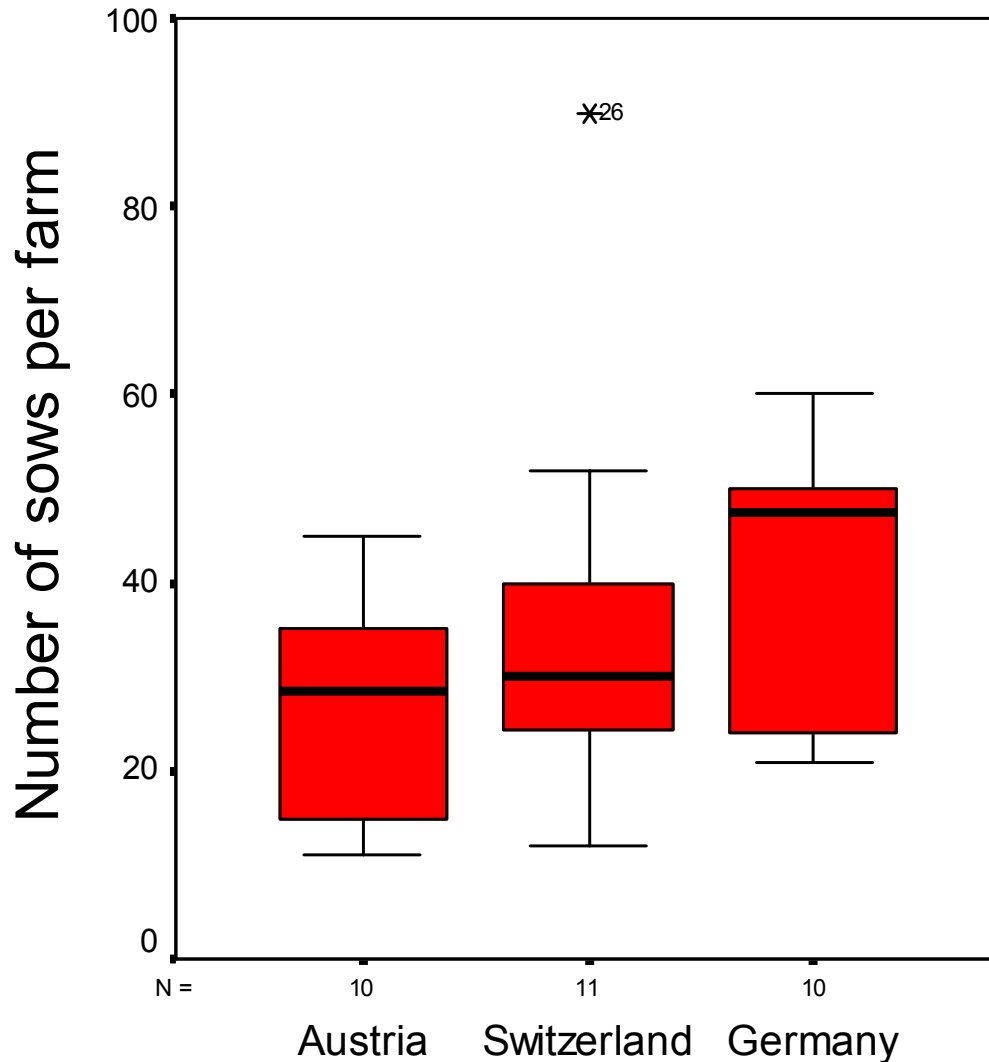
Results: Housing



7 outdoor climate, 24 closed

6 new stables, 25 modified stables

Results: Number of sows per farm

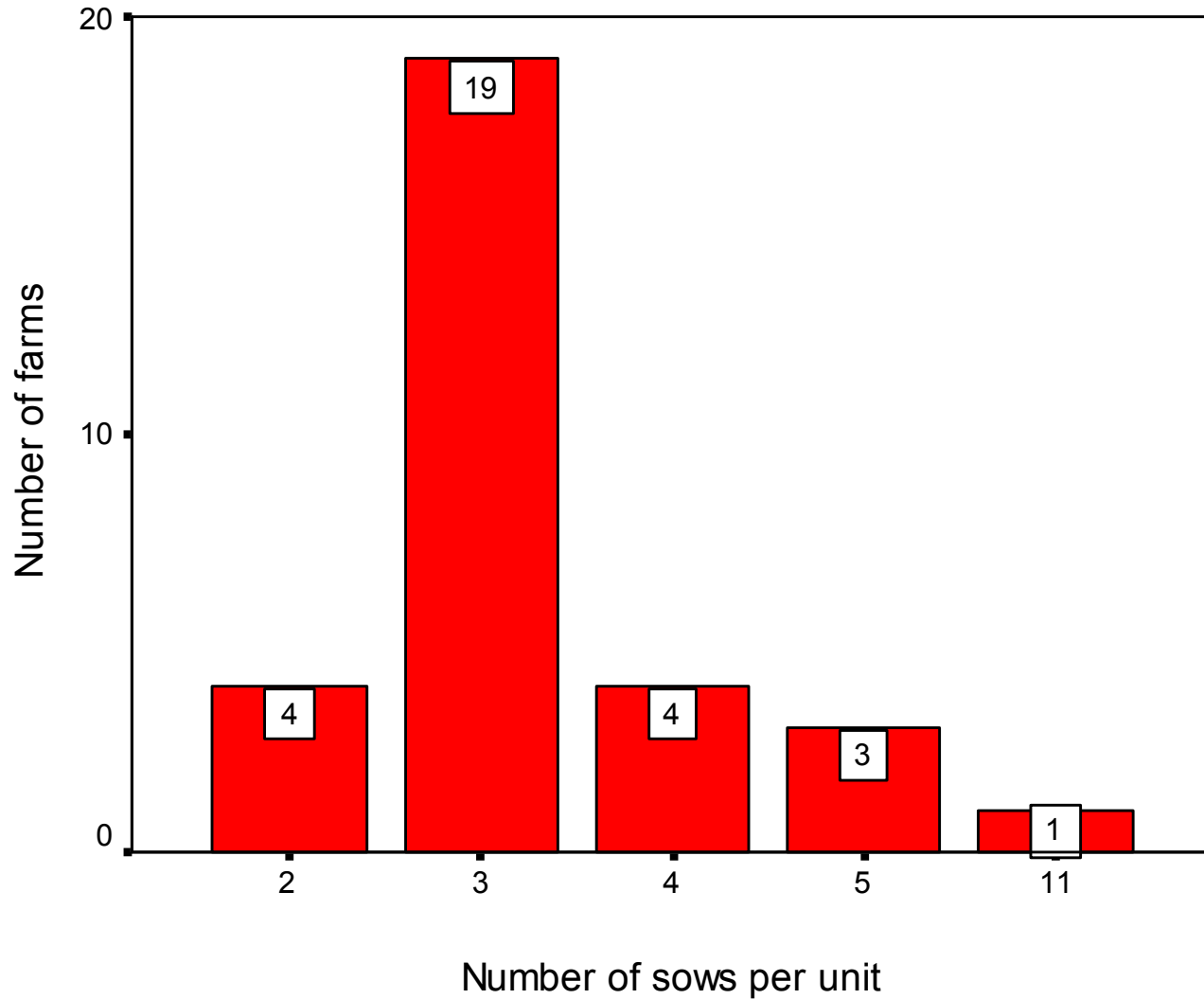


A: 27 (11 – 45)

CH: 36 (12 – 90)

D: 41 (21 – 60)

Results: Number of sows per unit



Results: Management

- > Keeping the planned group size
 - > six farms > 75 % of the groups
- > Keeping a low age difference between litters
 - > less than eight days in 84 % of all groups
- > **Preference for low age difference is more important than to keep the planned group size**

Results: Animal health

After weaning evaluation of: injuries at neck, body and teats, wounds at vulva, damage of extremities

- > Relatively little postural damages
- > Head-body-injuries correlate with the group-size
- > Injuries of teats are not correlated with the size of the group and amount of piglets

Results: Human-Animal relationship

- > Approach test: reaction of sows and piglets to an unfamiliar person
- > Handling test: behavior of the stockperson
- > More approach than retreat, flight or aggression
- > Sows were little afraid in group housing systems



Results: Body Condition Score and behavior

Evaluation of 192 sows

- > 74 % in good nutritional condition
- > 18 % were considered skinny
- > 8 % were considered fat

- > Problem of thin sows after lactation: more influence from feeding than from the lactating period
- > Only 18 of 203 sows (in 12 farms) behaved anxiously or aggressively

Results: Productivity

- > 9,1 weaned piglets per sow and litter (5,8 – 11,5)
- > Losses in the farrowing pen 15,6 %
- > Losses in the group housing 3,9 %

Final evaluation

- > **Most critical housing factors:**
 - > Piglet nest
 - > Feeding

Factor	Good	Mid	Bad
Pen design	9	17	5
Piglet nest	4	8	19
Outdoor run	6	18	7
Feeding	4	10	17
Management	8	11	8

Final evaluation

- > None of the farms provided optimal conditions in housing, feeding and management
- > None of the farms was considered successful in all: productivity, animal health and human animal relationship
- > No plausible correlations between success criteria and farm specific production conditions could be found

Recommendation: Management factors for successful group housing

- > Max. age difference between the piglets is 5 days
- > Min. piglet age for the day of grouping is 10 days
- > Group size of 3 – 4 sows

Conclusion

- > Group housing is an alternative system to single housing
- > Group suckling has advantages in animal welfare and economic aspects

But

- > To ensure success the basic requirements in
 - > Housing
 - > Feeding
 - > Management
 - > Veterinary treatmentmust be adhered to.

Thank you for your attention!



Beispiel Bewertungstabelle GS-Bucht

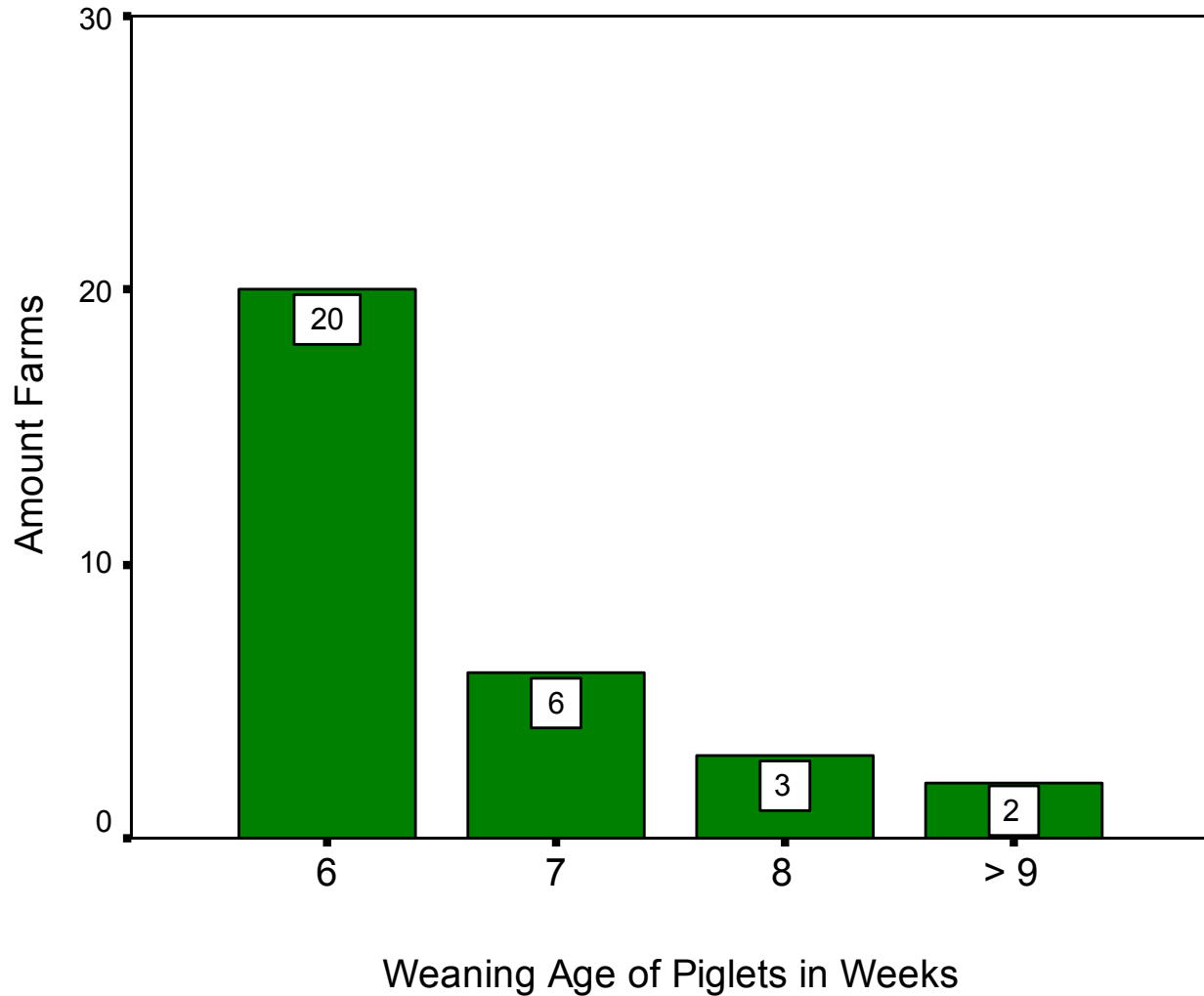
				Bewertung		
Ort/Was	Parameter	Anforderung	Begründung	Gut	Mittel	Schlecht
GS-Bucht	Gruppengröße	2 – 4 Sauen pro Gruppe	Häufigste in der Praxis anzutreffende Gruppengröße; stallbaulich und bezüglich Umtriebsplanung gut realisierbar	2 -4	5 – 7	> 7
	Liegefläche pro Sau in m ²	> 3,5 m ²	Reduziert Ferkelerdrücken: Jede Sau muss ungehindert liegen können und synchrones Säugen auf der Liegefläche muss möglich sein	> 3,5	3,4 – 2,5	< 2,4
	Einstreumaterial und -höhe	Stroh 5-10 cm hoch	Tierkomfort; Wühlmaterial, Wärmespeicher	Stroh, 5 – 10 cm		bodendeckend; Tiefstreu
Ferkelnest	Grundfläche pro Ferkel in m ²	> 0,1	Ausreichend Platz für Ferkel im Kleinklimabereich	> 0,1	0,1 – 0,08	< 0,08
	Zugfreiheit	Keine Zugluft durch Öffnungen (Spalten) in Deckel und Wänden	Ferkelgesundheit	Ja		Nein
	Wärmequelle	Fußboden- oder Deckelheizung	Gleichmäßige Wärmeverteilung im Ferkelnest	Fußboden-, Deckelheizung	Ferkellampe	Keine Wärmezufuhr

Idea of group suckling

- > **Natural behaviour**
- > **Reduction of the weaning stress**
- > **Economically interesting (stable, work schedule)**

- > **Animal friendly and economic system**

Results: Weaning age of piglets



Methods: Data collection

Researcher

- > Questionnaire for farm data, management, human-animal relationship
- > Data sheet for housing, animal health, BCS, human-animal relationship
- > Arrangement drawing of the group suckling pen

Farmer

- > Productivity data

Both

- > Piglet weight

Final evaluation

Success criteria	Good	Mid	Bad	Missing
Productivity	1	13	13	4
Animal Health	-	14	16	1
Skin lesions, BCS, behaviour	6	20	4	1
Human animal relationship	6	13	5	7