

## Suckling Behaviour of Piglets Half of whose Littermates have been Removed

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### ABSTRACT

When litters were divided into two halves on the basis of piglet weight and the heavier half of a litter were weaned at 4 weeks, the piglets remaining with the sow obtained 31% more milk per day and grew faster than they would otherwise have done. How was this achieved?

The duration of milk transfer bouts (when piglets were seen swallowing) increased from 24 s, 6 days before the litter was split, to 26 s just after the split ( $P < 0.05$ ), and was unchanged the next day ( $P > 0.05$ , multiple-comparison  $t$ -tests allowing for the effect of sow identity,  $df = 106$ , all data based on 6 litters). The interval between milk transfer bouts decreased from 40 min before the split to 36 min just after the split, but increased again to 45 min the following day ( $P < 0.05$  for both comparisons, tests as above). As a result the time spent in milk transfer per hour increased just after the split (Wilcoxon test,  $n = 6$ ,  $P = 0.036$ ), but next day returned to its previous level. There was no evidence that piglets moved to more productive teats; net movement towards the anterior end of the udder was negligible ( $0.16 \pm 0.24$  (S.E.) teat positions). However, the proportion of piglets exploiting more than one teat rose from 0.33 before the split to 0.63 the day afterwards ( $\chi^2 = 5.4$ , 1  $df$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Our data suggest that the piglets remaining with the sow after the split obtained more milk by exploiting more teats than had been possible before.

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