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THE VOICE OF THE BRITISH PIG INDUSTRY

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The future...

... of lactating sow feeding

Gestal Solo

Here NOW

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The Gestal goes Solo

I suppose it might be too much to say that the feed barrow is redundant, but if you use the Gestal lactating sow feeder from JYGA Technologies at least you won't need it in the farrowing house, writes Sam Walton.

Having previously visited and reported on a couple of installations of the Gestal System, and talked to two delighted farrowing house operators, I was invited by AM Warkup to see the newly arrived Gestal Solo. Launched at EuroTier in Hanover in November 2012, the Solo is now exclusively available in the UK from the East Yorkshire-based company.

The Solo works on exactly the same principle as the original model, with the added advantage of being able to function on its own without recourse to a central computer. Four to six preprogrammed units can be trialled without committing to the cost of a full installation. If you decide the system is for you, the trial units can be added to the main installation giving the built-in option of central control from a convenient office.

A high-speed internet link allows remote monitoring both by the supplier and yourself, should you so wish. Something else to do in the pub! In fact, input from the system experts can be invaluable, particularly in the early stages.

Operation of the equipment is simple, but the interpretation of the results to help fine-tune the feeding curves is easier with assistance from an experienced eye.

So, how does the system work? The day is divided up into feeding periods, with between four and eight being normal. At the start of each period 40g of feed is dropped into the feed trough, signalling to the sow that feed is now available. The sow, at her own pace, then activates a trough-mounted trigger that releases a kilo of food at a time up to a preset limit in any feed period.

In addition, a discretionary 10% or more feed is available for a hungrier sow. If she consistently uses her allocation plus the additional ration, then it's time to raise her to another curve.

For the sow that might play with her trigger and flood her trough with feed, a built-in delay between feed drops prevents this. Should a sow have not eaten her full allocation, the next feed period will not commence until she has.

Light displays at both the Gestal Solo unit, the central computer and, if you insist, your mobile device, clearly show the current state of affairs. The computer monitors and records feeding behaviour, in effect setting up a dialogue with the sow and showing the stockman the sows that are on the correct feeding regime, those that would benefit from more and those from less.

JYGA and Warkup's experience has enabled them to create standard feed curves based on a sows parity, with the Gestal Solo allowing the sow to 'comment' on its suitability.

There appear to be many

advantages to this system. It's both rewarding for the stockman by having a remarkably short payback period if the early improvements in performance continue, and it's rewarding for the sow, who quickly learns that her dietary requirements are to be met.

Targeted intake also gives quieter, heavy-milking sows; heavier weaning weights; sows leaving the farrowing house in good condition; shorter times to service; and higher litter birth weights next time round. The apparent paradox of more milk for less food is explained by the virtual elimination of wastage.

For those who like information there's a lot available, and for those, like me, who don't, the simple system of lights and coloured feed intake graphs gives all the guidance required.

At times of pressure on today's mixed farms, one user told me that they did not suffer a drop in farrowing house performance, even at harvest, remotely keeping an eye on the sows while letting them get on with the job.

I know that technology keeps moving on, but with the Gestal Solo sow feeding appears to have come of age!



In our May issue Sam visits a York-based pig unit with 119 of the Gestal feeding units.



Above and Right: Next month we'll hear about the Gestal sow feeding units in place at Phil Stephenson's Grove Farm pig unit at Melbourne, near York.