

## ANIMAL WELFARE

**Title:** How does drinking behavior influence feed intake and the development of behavior problems in newly weaned piglets? **NPB # 05-052**

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### ABSTRACT

During the first few days after weaning, pigs often experience weight loss, which may be partly due to their substitution of drinking for feeding. Using drinker devices other than the standard nipple drinker may ease piglets' transition at weaning by facilitating initiation of feeding and preventing the development of behavior problems such as belly nosing. Two experiments were run to determine the effect of drinker type on water and food intake, growth rates and belly-nosing and to determine piglets' drinker preference at two different weaning ages. In the first experiment, piglets were given one of three drinkers (standard nipple, push-lever bowl or a float bowl), and their growth and behavior was examined through two weeks. When given only the nipple drinker, piglets wasted significant amounts of water. With only the float bowl drinker, water consumption was limited due to soiled water. With only the push-lever drinker, piglets consumed adequate amounts of water and spent less time belly nosing than other piglets. There was no effect of drinker type on growth rates.

In the second experiment, piglets were weaned at either 20 or 28 days of age and given access to all three drinker devices. Their preference for a drinker type and the influence of their preference on production and behavior was examined. Piglets at both weaning ages spent similar amounts of time at the nipple and push-lever drinkers during the first two days after weaning, while spending little time at the float bowl drinker. Younger weaned piglets that preferred the push-lever drinker gained more weight than those piglets that preferred the nipple drinker. Younger weaned piglets also spent more time at the push-lever drinker at days 8 and 9 after weaning than older weaned piglets. It appears that piglets are not averse to using the push-lever drinker at either weaning age, and this drinker device can minimize water wastage and behavior problems while not negatively affecting feed intake or growth rates.

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