

PORCUS

sappo

Summer 2025
Vol. 48 | No. 4

PrimeCuts

Celebrating the best of our industry



SUMMER

Development Tour 2025: Growing people is growing our business

The production sites management team recently embarked on an enlightening development tour across the Netherlands and Germany to explore progressive leadership in farm management, animal welfare, breeding, and genetics.

The tour offered an in-depth look at innovative practices and technological advances in the global pig industry, with particular emphasis on the expertise of our partners at Topigs Norsvin. Each site visit deepened the understanding that innovation, strict biosecurity, and a commitment to animal welfare are vital drivers for a sustainable future in pork production.





Large-scale production and management

At the Van Asten Group facility in Sterksel, the Netherlands, which houses 4 000 sows, participants gained insight into the complexities and efficiencies of large-scale swine management. The visit highlighted the importance of operational precision and the substantial measures required to maintain strong internal biosecurity.



Genetic multiplication success

The Jacobs Farm multiplier operation, managing 400 sows, showcased the critical factors behind successful multiplication of TN70 gilts and the rearing of Z-line gilts. Precision and consistency drive both productivity and quality outcomes.

Nutrition, research, and welfare

At the Denkavit Innovation Centre in the Netherlands, attention shifted towards piglet nutrition and sow welfare. Strategies in optimised early-life feeding were explored, emphasising how nutritional precision enhances performance and smooths weaning transitions.

Innovative feeding protocols and the use of free-farrowing pens were also observed, designed to allow greater sow movement while maintaining piglet quality. The experience provided practical insights for integrating higher welfare standards into commercial operations.



Legislation and industry adaptation

At Topigs Norsvin SNW in Germany, the team explored how shifting consumer expectations and evolving European regulations are reshaping pork production. Briefings on new German legislation provided a deeper understanding of the compliance challenges and opportunities these changes bring.

A key focus was on sustainable methods for producing pigs with long tails, including management strategies, stable climate control, and environmental enrichment techniques that support welfare while meeting modern standards.

A farm visit further demonstrated how modern housing concepts, such as systems integrating outdoor access, can successfully combine high welfare with production efficiency. Observing the animals' behavioural freedom and improved quality of life provided valuable, real-world examples of how welfare-focused production can be both successful and sustainable.



Biosecurity and responsible antibiotic use

At the MS Schippers Group HyCare finishing farm, participants examined proactive biosecurity initiatives that exemplify operational excellence and responsible animal health management.

The HyCare concept focuses on creating a hyper-clean, pathogen-reduced environment that lowers disease pressure and significantly reduces the need for antibiotics. This approach reinforces the direct connection between stringent biosecurity, improved animal health, and responsible antibiotic stewardship.

Experiencing and observing new concepts firsthand inspired valuable reflection on how existing systems can be further improved.

The Development Tour 2025 reaffirmed that by growing people – their knowledge, curiosity, and commitment – the business continues to grow and strengthen.

*Wishing you and your
family a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!*

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13 piglets detected

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Artificial intelligence meets animal welfare: Computer vision in free-farrowing systems

By Lisette van der Zande

The movement to abolish farrowing crates is gaining momentum and Topigs Norsvin is leading the way. Through Innova Canada, our free-farrowing nucleus farm, combined with advanced research driven by technology and artificial intelligence, Topigs Norsvin has set a new standard.

Innova Canada is the primary breeding location for the Z-line – one of the lines used in the production of the TN70 sow. Innova Canada operates using a free-farrowing housing system and all animals have long tails.

In a free-farrowing system, a sow can move freely around her pen without any confinement, not even temporarily. This freedom allows her to express natural behaviours such as nest building just before giving birth. The ability to perform these prepartum behaviours has shown to improve birth outcomes, including shorter farrowing duration, better colostrum quality, and a stronger maternal instinct.

Not without challenges

Transitioning to free-farrowing systems is not without challenges. One concern is a potential rise in piglet mortality, which can impact both piglet welfare and farm economics. Alongside adjustments in managing free-farrowing systems, sows can be selectively bred to perform better in this environment. To do so, we

need accurate measurements of mothering ability in free-farrowing conditions to inform breeding decisions. That is why, at Innova Canada, we have installed cameras above the farrowing pens.

By using computer vision models, we can continuously monitor the behaviour of the sows and piglets in ways that far exceed what human observation can achieve. This technology offers exciting possibilities to better understand and improve animal welfare, while also supporting farmers as they transition to free-farrowing systems.

Incorporated into our breeding goals

The next step in our research is to link the outputs of the computer vision models to biologically relevant traits that can be incorporated into Topigs Norsvin's breeding goals. Our aim is to breed sows with enhanced mothering abilities – sows that thrive in free-farrowing systems while still performing well in traditional crated farrowing and lactation setups. This approach boosts welfare for sows, piglets, and farmers alike, without increasing costs.

Topigs Norsvin is proud to be at the forefront of this transformation. The future of pig farming is more humane, smarter, and closer than ever.

www.topignorsvin.co.za

 **Topigs Norsvin**
PROGRESS IN PIGS

*As summer light fills the sky and 2025
draws to a close, may it remind us that
progress often begins with those
who refuse to believe in limits.*