

## Pig Fact Sheet 3

### GILT REARING FOR LIFELONG PERFORMANCE

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*The gilt is the future of any pig production enterprise and must be treated with great care and attention. She needs to be fed and managed properly in order to help her to achieve her full breeding potential. The premature culling of breeding females due to poor productivity impacts heavily on the economics of production.*

This newsletter aims to provide some guidelines for management of these animals to get them off to a productive start.

#### What are the problems?

Modern pig genotypes have been selected for increased leanness and reduced backfat. These traits are desirable for the grow-finish pig but may be inappropriate for the breeding female.

Condition of the gilt at first mating has a significant effect on overall lifetime performance of the sow. It has been calculated that in order for a sow to cover her replacement costs, she must produce three to four litters in her lifetime.



#### What are the key factors for success?

**Acclimatisation:** The diseases present on any farm present a challenge for incoming livestock and exposure can cause a significant reduction in performance if the animal is not previously acclimatised. This must occur in a controlled “kind” manner in order that immunity develops gradually. The actual process of acclimatisation will differ depending on the health of both units and the diseases present. Home produced replacements may need to be sidelined out of grower / fatter accommodation to avoid them becoming grossly “over exposed”.

**Nutrition:** The young gilt requires the correct diet, feeding strategy, accommodation and time to accumulate the necessary body weight, body reserves and body condition at first mating. Feeding a gilt rearer ration from 60kg can help the gilts achieve this.

**Puberty:** Puberty in the gilt is initiated by complex hormonal mechanisms that are associated with growth and age. Anoestrus in gilts is a major source of economic loss as the animal may be lost before she has produced any litters. In order for a gilt to attain puberty her physiological needs must be met these are;

- **Weight / age** – gilts should be bred at a target weight of 135-150kg and between 210-240 days old. Body condition score should be 3 at first service.
- **Stocking Rate** – it is imperative that gilts are allowed sufficient space and that group sizes are small enough in order to exhibit signs of heat.
- **Boar Contact** – it has been demonstrated that introducing boar contact to gilts at 70-80kg can help stimulate puberty earlier and can improve follicular maturation and improve numbers ovulated.
- **Lighting** – Day length is important for both oestrus and maintenance of pregnancy. Light intensity can be affected by accumulation of dust/grime on lights, high sided pens, shadows from feeders or badly placed lighting. It has been shown that gilts that are subjected to 14-18 hours of light daily reach puberty earlier, are more sexually active and have longer standing heats.