

Key Targets

1

Farrowing rate:

Aim for 90%+



2

Total born:

Aim for 13+



3

Optimise sow longevity and reduce the number culled prematurely ie before three parities

Gilt management:

Service to farrowing

Gilt performance is a key element towards the productivity of the herd with between **20–25%** of production from gilts at any time. Investing in their future is essential.

Research has shown that lifetime productivity is not related to backfat alone, but overall 'fitness'. Body mass is important and gilts should be fed a diet that facilitates both fat and lean meat deposition. In situations where gilts have a high growth rate, or culling for leg problems has been an issue, feed intake should be restricted to **80–90%** of appetite. See *Research into Action 4* for more information.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Factors that should be considered when deciding the appropriate time to serve gilts include:

- System, eg indoors, outdoors, semi extensive
- Housing, eg separate gilt groups or integrated with the sows
- Previous experience of gilts' productivity
- Actual and expected sow longevity.

Typical service targets:

- **135–170kg** liveweight
- **220–270** days of age
- Body condition score (BCS) **3–3.5**

By service, the gilts will have experienced at least one heat cycle and reached the required stature and body condition.

Preparing for service

Where a progestagen is used to control oestrus, there are a number of best practice principles which should be followed to ensure that at least **90%+** of gilts are cycling five to seven days post-withdrawal:

- Ensure that the gilt has already reached puberty
- Don't start the programme if the gilt is already in oestrus

- Preferably feed the gilts individually or use a new oral doser; gilts can be trained with apple juice or cod liver oil
- If group feeding, initially feed **1kg** of feed plus the progestagen per gilt, distribute, allowing sufficient space for the gilt to eat her allocation; feed the remaining daily allowance once the treated food has been consumed
- Once the progestagen has been withdrawn, the gilts should be placed on ad-lib feeding and receive daily boar contact to stimulate oestrus as normal.



Gilts should, ideally, be fed individually when receiving progestagen



Feeding strategy

- When gilts are not on an oestrus synchronisation programme, they are generally fed 'to appetite' or on an ad-lib basis up to service. See *KT Bulletin 6: Gilt Feeding Strategies*
- An exception to this is where growth has been restricted due to the gilts' inherent fast daily growth and/or problems with lameness culling. These should be fed ad-lib for the cycle, or at least the last **14** days of the cycle prior to service, to flush the gilts and optimise their ovulation rate.

Familiarisation and stockmanship

- It is important that gilts are familiar with both the routine of moving to the heat detection/ AI facilities and that they are also allowed to explore the area, including meeting the boars
- Familiarisation will reduce stress, promote calm gilt behaviour and strong standing reflexes during insemination. See *Work Instructions 13 and 14: Humanising and Handling Gilts* for more information.



Gilts should be familiarised with the routine prior to service

Service: Using AI effectively

- Only skilled AI operators should inseminate gilts as it can be more difficult to gauge the correct moment to inseminate and is occasionally more difficult to obtain a catheter lock
- Gilts are notorious for taking a long time to inseminate
- If you have employed a gilt familiarisation routine and have also provided a small (typically **2m x 2m**) specialist AI pen with excellent boar contact, then the only options are patience or using insemination stalls and/ or insemination aids. See *Action for Productivity sheets 29, 30 and 31* for more detailed information on AI.

Using natural and AI together

If this service combination is used, it is important that:

- The gilt is familiar with the chosen boar and service pen
- The boar and gilt body sizes are correctly matched



Move gilts in a calm, unhurried manner

- Younger boars are supervised and not overworked
- The boar service should be the first service in the oestrus period, followed **18–24** hours later with an artificial insemination.

Service to first farrowing

- Some producers feed a gilt rearer diet during the first gestation
- Gilt rearer diets generally contain a higher level of lysine (**0.7%**) which promotes further deposition of body lean tissue as the gilt grows and matures
- Advice on diet curve and specification should be obtained from the unit veterinarian, genetics supplier and nutritionist. See *KT Bulletin 6: Gilt Feeding Strategies* for further detail.

First lactation

- This is a critical time for the gilt
- Reducing anxiety by following the recommended guidelines will make the experience easier
- It is important that loss of body condition is minimised while ensuring that udder function is maximised by her suckling as large a litter as possible to ensure all functional teats are suckled
- Feeding a high specification lactation diet containing at least **1% lysine and 14.5MJ DE/kg** and employing feeding regimes to encourage daily intake is essential
- Maintain room temperature between **16–18°C**
- Ensure good supply (**2.0l/min**) of clean water and consider providing extra water at feeding
- Use the Stotfold feeding curve to gradually increase daily intake and prevent stalling
- Feed three times a day for at least the last week of lactation. See *Work Instructions 13 and 14: Humanising and Handling Gilts*.

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