

Key Targets

1 Maintain health status of the herd



2 Reduce drop-outs through good environmental acclimatisation

3 Achieve optimum body weight and condition for puberty stimulation

4 Successful humanisation of incoming gilts

Gilt management:

Isolation, acclimatisation and integration

Achieving successful isolation, acclimatisation and integration of incoming gilts is the first stage of any good gilt replacement plan and is discussed in this document. Maintaining the health status of your herd is critical to sustaining productivity and it is, therefore, important to know the disease profile of both incoming stock and the receiving herd.

Breeding companies are able to declare the health status of their gilts. This information is exchangeable at a veterinary level and purchasers of breeding stock should ask their veterinary advisor to liaise with that of the supplier. A unit breeding its own replacements should consult their vet if any health changes occur on farm.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Isolation facilities

Isolation is a method of quarantining stock. When bringing gilts onto a unit from a different site (purchased or home-bred off-site), isolation is recommended to avoid a breakdown of the herd health status. The isolation period should last at least four weeks.

- These need to be at least **50m** from the main herd accommodation
- Buildings and equipment must be fit for purpose
- Ideally, staff and equipment should be different to those coming into contact with the main herd
- If staff are shared between facilities:
 - Enforce a shower-in shower-out policy and/or ensure clothing and footwear are changed
 - Staff should start their work at the site with the known health status (usually the main herd) and end at the site with unknown health status (usually the isolation unit). This is of particular importance when restocking and upgrading the farm health status
 - Work with the isolated gilts last, so that staff can shower and be pig free overnight before entering the main herd again
- Ensure visitors are at least **24 hours** pig free after visiting the isolation unit, before entering the main herd
- Provide separate vet and med facilities for the isolation area
- Monitor the gilts' health status daily and seek veterinary advice if any concerns arise
- Overall biosecurity should be reviewed regularly, refer to *Action for Productivity 13: Biosecurity*
- On arrival, sort gilts by age and weight and, if necessary, by genetic line
- Correct paperwork, including ID and date of birth of gilt, is essential at delivery
- Ensure the stocking densities are correct.



Isolation facilities need to be at least 50m from the main herd accommodation



It is likely that the facilities at the supplying site will be different from those at the isolation unit. Making the gilt comfortable as quickly as possible is an important part of isolation. Key areas to focus on are:

- **Feed and water:** Check the system and feed type the gilts received on the source unit and ensure they all drink and eat after delivery
- **Floor type:** If pigs come from a straw-based system, use straw or solid flooring before introducing them to slatted systems
- **Medication:** The gilts may require additional vaccines or medication in line with the farm VHP and discussions with your vet.

If your acclimatisation facility is separate from the isolation unit, ask your vet to check with the supplier's veterinary advisor that no new health problems have occurred in the source herd since the gilts left.

Acclimatisation

The aim of acclimatisation is to ensure that gilts are exposed to, recovered from and fully immune to the recipient herd's diseases before entering the main herd. Some units start this process in isolation, but veterinary advice will often be to start the acclimatisation programme after isolation but still within a semi-isolated area of the unit. This degree of separation can help identify any breakdowns that occur here, that came in with the gilts or were acquired after arrival.

- Acclimatisation can be achieved by introducing cull sows or grower/finisher stock to the new arrivals
- With very high health gilts, it may be necessary to introduce adult pigs for the first **14 days** and then replace with growers, which shed more disease
- It may be necessary to medicate the gilts depending on how they respond during the acclimatisation period, discuss further with your vet
- Work with gilts after the rest of the herd
- Acclimatisation will take up to four weeks, with exposure ceasing at least two weeks before the gilts are transferred into the main service area
- Timely vaccinations should be carried out in accordance with your herd health plan.

Note: All replacement boars should go through the same process as replacement gilts.

Integration

- Home-bred gilts are able to build up natural immunity and have less chance of developing health problems
- Where gilts are streamed in separate accommodation from **60kg** onwards, or taken off-site before returning as maiden gilts, it may be appropriate to employ an acclimatisation programme; discuss with your vet



Use straw-based systems before introducing to slatted systems



Ensure gilts drink after delivery

- Before integrating with the main herd, ask your vet to check with the supplier's veterinary advisor that no new health problems have occurred in the source herd since the gilts left.

SUMMARY

Managing incoming gilts through proper isolation and acclimatisation will minimise any potential health challenges that could disrupt the main herd. Good management in terms of housing, feeding, lighting temperature, boar contact and heat detection will facilitate a smooth integration and optimise the productivity and longevity of the breeding herd.

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