

Work instruction – Handling gilts

Depending on your policy for humanisation of gilts (see Work Instruction 14) they can have varied levels of trepidation when being handled and managed for the first cycle. This can start from stimulating all the way through to their first weaning as the surroundings and interactions will be new.

It is important to always think of a gilt as a special case and have that in the front of your mind when handling them.

Equipment required

- Pig boards

Personal safety

- **Gilts like sows can be unpredictable. Only competent staff should move gilts through the system**

Some areas for consideration

Routine tasks that will be new to gilts and which they will potentially be wary of include:

- Tagging, vaccination, first contact with boar at stimulation, first serve (natural or AI), first farrowing and learning to be a mother
- Going into farrowing accommodation for indoor and outdoor gilts will also be new and potentially stressful
- Other situations like changes in feeder, feed type, drinker type, floor type and group size should also be considered as a learning curve for gilts

Preparation

- Ensure the way forward is clear, secure and obvious
- Minimise distractions and changes in light levels eg shadows
- Ensure the area does not pose a risk of injury to pig or stockman eg non-slip surface



Figure 1. Gilts often double up in farrowing arcs as they like to be close to others. Continue to separate gilts back into their correct huts



Figure 2. Move gilts into the farrowing crate in good time, add bedding by the head to distract her and make sure they can use the drinker

Outline of work

- Move the gilt in a calm, unhurried manner
- Allow the gilt to walk to its destination at its own pace at all times
- If necessary encourage animals forward using a pig board and voice
- Do not kick the gilts or use sticks/prods to hit them
- Only encourage animals forward when the way ahead of them is clear
- After each task eg tagging or serving, reassure the gilt by scratching or patting her on the neck



Figure 3. Consider changes in feeder type. If it is manual, start it off so they can find food on the plated area. If it is automated check all gilts have found where the food has been deposited



Figure 4. Consider changes in drinker type. When the gilts are exploring their new pen press the drinker so they know where the water comes

Further information

- AHDB Pork factsheet: **Loading and unloading pigs**
- AHDB Pork factsheet: **Handling and restraining pigs**

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