



# Target 2TS

BREEDING

Gilt management



# Gilt team management

When Fabio Capello chose his final 23 for the World Cup he could not have foreseen that just 24 hours after the England team arrived in South Africa his captain would be injured.

Fortunately, forward planning allowed him to select a new captain from his acclimatised pool of replacement players.

As pig producers, do we have similar back-up tools in place to reduce the risk of 'gilt fall-outs'? It is certainly an expensive game if we get it wrong. The successful development of replacement gilts requires co-ordination of several factors including health, nutrition, genetics, housing and management.

Reproductive efficiency in the breeding herd starts with the gilt pool – the group of young females selected as potential replacements for the breeding herd. Gilt housing design can affect reproduction, so the facilities in which these potential replacement gilts are housed should be carefully managed:

- It is economical to maintain developing gilts under cool, white fluorescent light (270-500 lux at gilt eye level) for 10-12 hours/day
- An optimal housing environment should

be 16°C, 35% relative humidity, 12 hours light: 12 hours dark, to maximise the number of eggs ovulated at puberty



- Gilts that are heat stressed will have a greater incidence of cystic follicles than those housed in optimal environmental conditions. Plenty of wallow and shade should be provided for outdoor gilts
- To maximise the efficiency of oestrus detection, boars should be housed away from gilts to ensure they don't receive continuous stimuli prior to detection. Find more advice on boar contact management

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- Overcrowding of gilts will increase corticosteroid levels in the blood, indicating chronic stress; this can delay puberty and reduce sexual behaviour of gilts
- Producers should regularly discuss the gilt development program with their vet and nutritionist.

The actual number of females needed depends on production levels, sow culling rate and selection intensity. Major increases in breeding herd efficiency can be achieved by meeting replacement targets from smaller pools of truly select gilts, which also have improved lifetime performance.

Like with any team, start by approaching gilt management and oestrus stimulation in a systematic manner. The entire management team must buy into the program. Breeding and managing gilts is hard work and, to make sure it is successful, the best people should be assigned to the job.

**Look out for the 2TS gilt management pack this summer. Contact BPEX for more information (details below).**

## First farrowing success

First farrowing for a gilt is a new and strange experience which could lead to savaging.

Indoor and outdoor units approach gilt management differently. Outdoors it is common to keep a row or paddock of gilts together or create individual farrowing pens for gilts, even when the herd is in groups.

This helps reduce the risk of doubling up with their gilt 'friends' and bullying by larger older sows which impairs water and feed intake. It also allows them to follow their own individual feed curve.

Indoor systems commonly put gilts in with experienced older sows that are used to the routine and farrow more calmly, hoping this influences the gilts. Gilts in

crates will need more time to get to know the drinking and feeding system and the routine.

It might be worth reviewing systems with a regional KT Manager to ensure you meet the gilts' special needs and set them up for life as a productive sow.



## Giving piglets a good start

Piglets have fairly simple requirements – warmth, food and sleep. Good management is key to giving them a good start and heading towards the industry target of two tonnes of pig meat per sow per year.

Piglet expert Dr. Emma Baxter from the Scottish Agriculture College toured the country and through BPEX workshops reached nearly 300 producers and stockpeople stressing the importance of best practice.

It is important to ensure a unit can cope with the larger litters that tend to be born with a larger range in size and viability. Adding extra labour time to those critical farrowing days can ensure critical interventions can be put in

place, and other management tools such as cross fostering are being implemented properly. Visit [www.2TS.org.uk](http://www.2TS.org.uk) to download *Action for Productivity* factsheets No. 14: Newborn management (indoors) and No.17: Colostrum: Food for life.

Outdoors, research has shown chilling is not a major mortality factor because huts are thoroughly insulated with straw. Chilled piglets are more common in indoor systems, where it is vital to use bedding on the slats or cover up the draught in other ways. Outdoor producers rely on good maternal instinct for piglet survival. Calm mothers show less tendency to savage and are more settled during farrowing.

For more information contact Miriam Drewett on 02476 478794 email [miriam.drewett@bpex.org.uk](mailto:miriam.drewett@bpex.org.uk)

To learn more about the two tonne sow campaign, go to [www.2TS.org.uk](http://www.2TS.org.uk)