The Non-Negotiable Basics to Develop High Lifetime Performance Gilts

"Gilts are the foundation of your herd."

"Industry-wide, there is still skepticism over how much gilts can impact overall whole herd results," says Dr. Pedro Mosqueira, PIC Technical Services Manager. "We believe that there is still room for improvement in sow performance through proper gilt development."

It is important to care for gilts properly from birth, not just during the few weeks' right before they are bred. "We cannot treat gilts like market pigs or we risk their health, productivity and longevity," Mosqueira says. "The ultimate goal is great lifetime performance for each sow, from first parity onward. Healthy grown and developed gilts will ensure consistent sow productivity and longevity."

Below is a list of the recommended DO's and DON'Ts on proper gilt development:

DO
Provide proper gilt nutrition.
WHY?
Reproductive success will only be maximized if proper nutrition is provided. See this Pig Improver for more ideas and specifications on proper gilt feeding.

DON'T
Conduct any health procedures in the three weeks prior to breeding.
WHY?
Conducting health procedures during the three weeks prior to breeding may cause disruption of feed intake and negatively impact the reproductive process. It is important that gilts remain on a positive nutritional track during the 3 weeks prior to their first mating. Many people call this uninterrupted period of feed intake "flushing."

DON'T

Provide less than 4 effective weeks of isolation or less than 4 effective weeks of acclimatization.

WHY?

A program designed with your herd veterinarian should maximize the success of introducing incoming gilts. Typically, at least four weeks of isolation and some associated testing is required to ensure gilts will not take undesired pathogens to the sow farm. Subsequently, at least four weeks of proper acclimatization to adjust to the health status of the recipient farm is required to ensure immune system function is strong.

DO

Introduce gilts periodically according to a structured plan.

WHY?

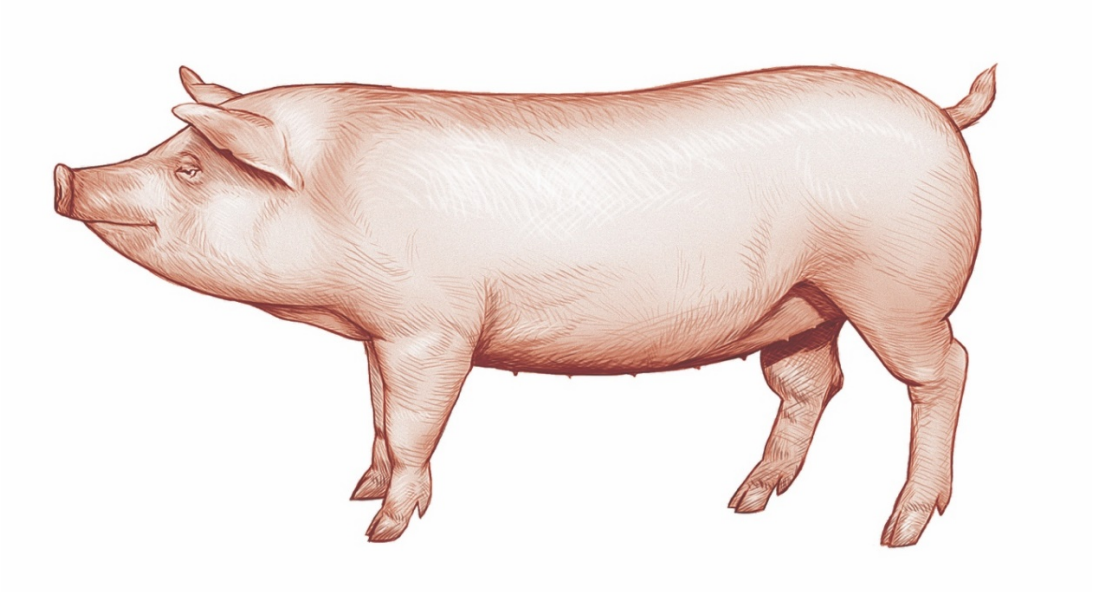
Periodic introduction keeps a balanced parity structure.

DON'T

Breed gilts unless she weighs between 300 and 350 lbs (135 and 160 kg).

WHY?

Gilts that are undersized or weigh too much will not become sows with a high lifetime performance.



DO

Train your entire staff on the health plan and proper gilt care.

WHY?

If health plans are not executable by every person on the farm, they will be at risk for not being implemented and herd health is at risk.

DO

Trust your staff, but verify that tasks have been completed. Remember that whatever can go wrong, might go wrong.

WHY?
If tasks related to herd health are not carried out, herd health will likely suffer.

DON'T
Ignore the importance of staff training and retention.
WHY?
High staff turnover means higher risk of improper care and higher risk of sow health problems and death.

HERE ARE THE SIX NON-NEGOTIABLE GILT DEVELOPMENT FACTORS

Labor	• Staffing: 7 days a week – 52 weeks a year • Ideal is to have accountability for P1 results
Stocking Density	• Nursery – 3.5 sq ft • Grower – 7.5 sq ft • GDU – 12 sq ft • Timely removal of problem gilts (or the one that won't make it)
Production Flow	• Right PN/DN size • 300 to 350 lbs BW at first breeding • Avoid mixing gilts of different lines in same pen
Feeding	• 7 feed phases, all with bulk feeders with 24 hour storage capacity. • 4 in Nursery – dry feeders, 1" linear space/pig • 2 in Grower and 1 in GDU – wet/dry feeders, 2" linear space/pig. • Water sources – height leveled to shoulder of the smallest gilts and flow rate of 0.25 gal/min
Health	• Vaccines and exposure finished 3 weeks prior first breeding • Early treatments on fall behinds
Environment	• Temp curve according to stocking density and gilts weight/age. • Humidity under 60%

In addition to proper nutrition for gilts, employ the correct strategies for maximizing feed intake.

"Gilts should receive about 8 pounds of feed a day in the weeks prior to breeding," explains Mosqueira. "In the case where gilts go to sow farms and are housed in individual spaces without water nipples prior to breeding, make sure they get enough feed from multiple feedings a day. To further maximize feed intake, delay water coming to the trough for approximately 60 minutes after feeding. When gilts go to sow farms and are housed in pens

prior to breeding, make sure they have one water source per every 10 gilts and also enough feeder space."

To maximize feed intake in gilts:

- Try to place pen-mates together.
- Keep a proper barn temperature curve, factoring in flooring, use of mats and phase of the animals.
- Provide protection against air drafts.
- Keep humidity below 65%.
- Ensure proper stocking density, depending on phase of pigs.
- In nursery, for the first 2 weeks after weaning provide 0.5 ft^2 per head of mat space as it helps teach young pigs about feed and feeders.

If you do not already have it, **request the PIC 'NUTRIENT SPECIFICATIONS MANUAL'** from your account manager. Tables 2.7 and 2.8 provide good checklists related to the most common rearing challenges.

With proper gilt rearing, you will maximize the long-term health and productivity of your herd. Our future – and yours – has never looked so bright, as PIC continues to deliver on our promise to Never Stop Improving.

In the next Pig Improver: Why Heavy Weights are the Future in Pig Production