



Target

Farm

Action

A monthly digest of practical advice for pig farmers from BPEX

Managing herd parity profile - it's just like making a cake

Managing the parity profile of a herd is a bit like making a cake; there are a number of important 'ingredients' needed to improve breeding herd productivity.

Before beginning to manage a herd's age, there must be a reliable method of sow identification; slap marking the sow on the shoulders or hind quarters with her tag number resolves the problem of lost tags and incorrect identification.

Secondly, producers must have a herd recording system that captures individual sow information.

Why is all this needed? The red profile in Figure 1 represents the herd most likely to be more productive. When analysing their parity profile, producers should ask:

- How many sows do I have in the most productive parities of three to five?
 - What percentage of my gilts am I losing from entrance to third parity?
 - How many sows are seven parities or more?
- Ideally a unit should aim for a minimum of

45% of sows between parities three and five. These are the most productive animals.

This can only be consistently achieved if there is good gilt retention.

Both of the above have similar gilt intakes with an annual replacement rate of roughly 44%.

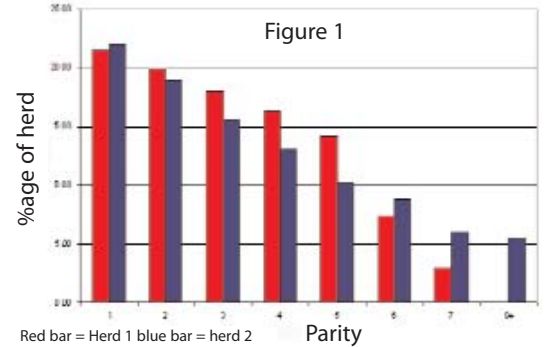
However, by the third parity the blue herd has lost nearly 30% of its gilts, whilst the red herd has only lost 16%.

Every culled gilt or second parity sow is a lost opportunity for achieving or exceeding target output.

It is also increasing the cost of weaned piglet production, given that it can take three to four parities for a gilt to pay back her introduction costs.

The other consequence of poor gilt retention is the inability to cull older and less productive sows.

Litter size has been increasing and, with it, the challenge of rearing larger litters.



While it is recognised that 'loading' gilts with a large litter to promote good milk production should help with udder function as they mature, a tight culling policy to remove them at the target parity is also important.

Again, this can only be implemented if gilts are available to be served at the required time.

Producers who analyse their herd's parity profile and find there is room for improvement should audit their gilt management system as a first step, then contact their area KT Manager for further advice and ideas.

Research project tackles problem of tail-biting

Help will soon be at hand for producers who want to reduce the risk of tail-biting, as a major project nears completion.

A series of visits has been made to 65 farms across England over the last two years to find out when, where and why tail biting problems have occurred.

Data from a range of typical production systems and housing types are now being analysed to pinpoint the on-farm factors which increase tail-biting.

So far, the five key pointers are:

- 1) Remove tail-bitten and tail-biting pigs quickly from mainstream pens;
- 2) Provide objects or substrate that keep your pigs occupied (suitable rootables);
- 3) Make sure all pigs have easy access to resources – feeders, drinkers or chewable objects and ensure plenty of lying space;
- 4) Safeguard internal comfort – ensure correct pig nutrition and good health;
- 5) Enhance external comfort – avoid suboptimal temperature and ventilation, and the presence of noxious gases.

Detailed results and advice should be available from BPEX by the end of the year.

There will be guidance on the key risks to look



■ Tail biting - a worrying problem

out for in both straw-based and non-straw-based systems, together with best practice advice on changes that can be made to reduce the risk and what to do when an outbreak of tail biting occurs on a unit.

The project has been run from Bristol University, in collaboration with the University of Newcastle, and with the support of both BPEX and the RSPCA.

Video helped the pig star

The KT Team is bringing pig units to life in producer meetings and workshops by using a variety of new video footage.

At one nursery pig meeting, video footage of outdoor breeding units showed the nursery unit managers where the weaners came from and helped them understand more about the challenges faced by breeding herds.

Other meetings have featured panoramic footage of outdoor farrowing fields, which has initiated valuable discussion on farrowing field efficiency and design.

Paul Dack, production manager at M J Easey's says: "It's an excellent idea – virtual farm tours bring us one step closer to farm walks.

It has been great for all the meetings we've attended and I have had very positive feedback from the units."

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