

A person in a blue uniform is holding a piglet. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a farm or processing facility. The text 'Pig Improver' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

## Pig Improver

### Gilt Care- Let's Review

#### Protecting the Foundation of Your Herd



In recent editions of the Pig Improver, we've presented a series of articles on how to rear, select, feed and protect PIC gilts in order to contribute to the success of your farm.

**Good gilts tend to become good sows that demonstrate high lifetime performance.**

**Correct gilt development helps ensure that PIC customers are the most successful pork producers in the world.**

Industry-wide, there is still skepticism over how much gilts can impact overall herd results.

**Be assured that those systems with effective development programs achieve consistently better herd performance.**

Proper gilt management means caring for gilts correctly **from birth, not just during the weeks before breeding**. We cannot treat gilts like market pigs or we risk their health, productivity and longevity in the herd. **A long, productive and impactful life is the goal for every PIC sow. Correct cared-for gilts are the key.**

Let's review the key points of proper gilt care:

## SELECT, DON'T SORT

Under pressure to meet mating targets, staff at many expanding pork operations are quickly **SORTING** through their gilt pools instead of **SELECTING** gilts. To properly select gilts, you must have a 'selection' mindset, not a 'sorting' mindset.

Important factors to keep in mind when selecting gilts are:

- KEEP THE GROUP AVERAGE IN MIND
- PERFORM A GENERAL MINIMUM STANDARD EVALUATION
- SPECIFICALLY SELECT FOR SOUND FEET AND LEGS
- NEXT, SELECT GILTS ON MATERNAL TRAITS

Proper gilt selection, along with the right environment and management, will help ensure your sow herd's productivity is maximized. For more information on the importance of gilt selection, listen to our podcast, [The Squeal episode](#) that features experts Dr. Ken Stalder, Malcolm Turley and Marlon Tafs.

## FEED GILTS THE RIGHT WAY

Gilts must be given appropriate feed to prepare them for a long and productive life in the breeding herd. **Gilts require specialized nutrition to ensure proper muscle growth, bone development, reproductive tract development and sound feet/leg structure.** Feeding your gilts a diet similar to a market pig diet can negatively affect the health and productivity of your gilts. Overall vitamin and mineral (calcium and phosphorus) content of gilt development diets should be higher than the ration given to market pigs. Gilts should also be fed a coarser ground grain than market pigs. For more information on gilt feeding, [read this Pig Improver](#).

## PROPER ACCLIMATIZATION

Correct acclimatization of gilts (generating immunity by correct exposure to sow herd organisms) is critical for health and reproductive success. Do not conduct any health procedures in the three weeks before breeding.

## REARING

It is important to care for gilts properly from birth, not just during the weeks right before they are bred.

Train your entire staff on the health plan and correct gilt care. Trust your staff, but verify that tasks have been completed.

Besides putting well-trained and reliable staff in place, ensure gilts are reared properly by:

- Maximizing feed and water intake
- Maintaining a correct barn temperature curve according to stocking density and gilt weight/age
- Keeping humidity below 60%
- Ensuring appropriate stocking density, depending on phase of pigs

### AND REMEMBER YOUR GILT PROGRAM...

To achieve breeding targets and maintain a balanced herd parity structure, ensure your PN/DN size is designed to deliver the right number of gilts at the right time.

“Gilts should start their productive life with a high litter size and on average, have at least five parities,” explains PIC Technical Services Director Dr. Juan Carlos Pinilla. “If your production system is not reaching these goals, you must work to identify what the constraints are and mitigate the impacts of those constraints.”

“Benchmark your own farm with the best farms of your system and/or against other farms that do well,” he adds, “and try to learn from them.”

Pinilla believes that in too many cases, farms are not putting their focus on preventing issues from becoming problems. They must fully execute their strategies.

“Farm managers and supervisors can have a tremendous impact in delivering consistently good gilt management by being proactive,” he says. “For example, anticipate labor shortages and prepare contingencies, plan for the replacement of heat-check boars and control the body condition in heat-check boars.”

**By ensuring proper gilt care, you will maximize the long-term health and productivity of your herd. PIC is here to help you- through your account manager and our many technical resources.**

**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: What Do Consumers Want? An Inside Look at Present and Future Attitudes Towards Pork*