Pigs for profit (Part 10)

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Different classes of pigs have special management requirements in order for them to obtain the best possible health and performance. In this, part 10 of our series, we concentrate on the introduction of gilts.

Gilts [unbred females] entering the herd from a breeder or having been selected from your own herd, need special treatment:
- If six months old or older, they should be vaccinated against E. coli, parvovirus, leptospirosis and erysipelas
- Treat them for mange and worms
- If visible worms are passed, gather all the dung and burn it
- Put the breeding gilts in a pen next to a mature boar, but do not give him free access to the gilts
- Breed gilts first time at 7-8 months if they have grown out well – a modern breed gilt should weigh 120 kg or more before she is put to the boar
- Feed breeding gilts with an unrestricted amount of grower meal, until they have been served
- Females come on heat every three weeks; it is better to wait an extra three weeks before serving a gilt that is undersized
- Gilts and sows on heat will usually seek the boar and stand firm to hand pressure on the middle of the back
- Always take the female on heat to the boar and observe that she has been properly served – the boar should remain mounted and pumping semen for at least five minutes
- Remove the served sow and repeat the procedure 12 and again 24 hours later – use two different boars if possible – you’ll get bigger litters
- Record the dates and the ID numbers of both the sow and boar on the cards.

Managing the pregnant sow
- Pregnant gilts are usually included as part of the sow herd
- Pregnancy lasts for about 115 days (16 weeks and three days)
- Observe the served females for signs of heat (restlessness, seeking the boar, swelling of the vulva in young animals) especially from 18-22 days after their first service. If she comes on heat, repeat the service procedure
- If she has been successfully served, she will be placed with the “dry sows”, i.e. the pregnant ones. It is a good idea to have a boar among the dry sows to identify any that come on heat, and serve them
- Vaccinate pregnant sows with a booster E. coli, and treat for worms, lice and mange two or three weeks before her farrowing date, as recommended
- In the last two weeks of pregnancy, observe the sow for any sign of constipation (pain, straining to defecate, hard small faeces, and no faeces)
- Prevent or correct constipation by feeding with wet bran and green feed
- Put the sow into her farrowing pen about a week before her due date, to become familiar with it and to go through nesting behaviour – give her plenty of bedding for this purpose.

Part 11 of our series will focus on the management of your pigs after farrowing.