

Solving Problems of New Barns and Introducing New Stock

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▪ Introduction

Over the last three years I have had the opportunity to visit approximately 12 open houses or barn openings in Alberta and Saskatchewan. It amazes me, and still does how little thought we give to the animals and people after spending millions of dollars on sites, buildings and equipment. What I propose to do in my presentation is to give you some areas to think about and hopefully give you some ideas or solutions.

▪ Staffing

Pre-Pig Staffing

It is a good idea if you have the manager and other key people involved when it comes time to install the equipment. Practical ideas can be incorporated as well as some important quality control. Other jobs to be done at this time are clean-up after construction and/or grounding of rough edges on poorly made slats and penning. This is a good time to set up your staff rules and regulations, as well as bio-security procedures.

Staff

On a 1200 sow unit, I would recommend having at least 3 staff at the beginning including the manager and increasing to 4 after 1 month. This is an ideal time to train staff without being overly rushed.

You will have to tag, stimulate, breed and vaccinate the gilts; train new boars and set up a breeding system. During this time there will be lots of "fine" tuning of the breeding area and dry sow barn (moving boars, gates, painting, numbering, etc.). This is also an ideal opportunity for the staff to start writing

their job details, descriptions and operations manuals. As a manager, you are setting the rules, regulations and example for years to come. It is easier to enforce rules if they have been instituted right from the beginning, rather than having to clamp down later on (for example, bio-security, smoking rules). This is your most ideal time to do this.

Keep reminding the staff that there will be continuous adjustments and change over the next couple of years.

▪ **Building Preparation**

Pits

Make sure all debris has been removed from the pits to prevent plugged lines. Put at least six inches (15 cm) of water in the pits with a bacteria starter. This will also help reduce the smell for any neighbours.

New concrete should be sprayed with De-toxified Sulfuric Acid (Silver - check with suppliers). Untreated new concrete can kill the bacteria for up to 2 years. If this happens you will get build up of solids in your pits, as well as more smell from your pits and lagoon.

Surface Concrete

Floors and slats should be pressure washed at least 3 times before any pigs are introduced. This will remove any sharp abrasions or chips as well as help remove the acid in the concrete. Grind off rough edges. The whole barn should be disinfected before the pigs are introduced.

As many barns are stocked in the winter months, make sure the barns are heated at room temperature for at least 2 weeks before stocking. This allows the concrete to warm without the trauma of chilling the animals.

Equipment

Staff, along with equipment installation personnel, should pre-test equipment. This includes feed distribution equipment and, more importantly, all heating and ventilating equipment.

Make sure all welds and sharp edges are ground off to protect both pigs and people. Use your hand as a test.

It is usually unavoidable to have open and bred gilts in stalls but, because most stalls are designed for sows, you can end up with gilts escaping. Some ways of reducing the problem is having a set of smaller or trainer stalls. The other

solution is to have some restraining bars or straps made up as a temporary aid. These can be moved as new gilts fill stalls.

▪ Gilt Introduction

Breeding

I am a firm believer of getting lots of gilts in early and breeding right away. Have your supplier stock pile gilts for at least a month before you receive your first batch. This way you can get enough weight and age on your gilts, and you can breed enough from your first batch to meet breeding targets and still leave the smallest ones to cycle and breed them second time around. If you do this I recommend the following delivery schedule:

Period 1	600 gilts	Week 1-4	150/week
Period 2	250 gilts	Week 5-8	125 biweekly
Period 3	200 gilts	Week 9-12	100 biweekly
Period 4	150 gilts	Week 13-16	75 biweekly
Period 5	100 gilts	Week 17-20	50 biweekly
Total	1300 gilts		

Gilts should be delivered weekly for the first 4 weeks and biweekly after that.

If you decide to breed the initial gilts as they come off the truck, then it is very important to keep the following parameters in mind:

For a 1200 sow unit, your target should be 56 farrowings/week.

- ▶ Week 1 - 4 65% farrowing rate expected
- ▶ Week 5+ 80% farrowing rate expected

Therefore -

- ▶ Week 1 - 4 Breed 85
- ▶ Week 5+ Breed 70

If you end up with a better farrowing rate, do not fret as you will have extra farrowing crates for the first three weeks and you will probably get the occasional small litter which you can foster off to other sows.

Decide whether you are going to natural breeding or AI. My preference is about half and half. Therefore, you will need 25 boars and the rest AI. Always get at least two mature boars (18 month plus) for stimulation and heat checking of gilts. Some people like to have a few "didi" boars available. Boars should also be stock piled by your supplier for at least a month before delivery.

My recommendation for breeding gilts is to breed with a boar for the first breeding and follow up with AI for subsequent breedings. On various breeding stock trials done on three 1200 sow fills, we found this combination the easiest for staff and the most productive.

If you decide to go this route, it is critical to have staff trained in the use of AI. Send them on some courses or provide opportunity for practical training. If you use a boar for the first breeding, then the gilts can be put in stalls and bred with AI for the second breeding.

After breeding, do daily checks for repeat gilts. Gilts have a tendency to have more irregular returns. They should also be pregnancy tested by 30, 40 and 70 days.

Tags

All gilts should have a tag when you receive them. Give them a second tag when they are bred. The original tag becomes their alternate identification and is useful if they lose a tag. Gilts that have a heat cycle and are not bred should be recorded and information transferred to a "Breeding Prediction Chart". This will also help if you need to make any delivery schedule changes.

Feed

Gilt feeding should be very well controlled so they are fit but not fat. New gilts should be put on a special gilt developer diet with medication. New gilts should be on ad lib of full feed until they come in heat or are bred. At breeding they should be put on restricted intake and fed a dry sow ration with medication.

Gilts that have come in heat, but are going to be left until the next cycle, should be restricted fed for 2 weeks and then be put on full feed Gilt Developer until breeding. If they are too small they may be left on full feed until the next cycle.

I am a firm believer of having medication in the feed for new gilts. This gives a blanket treatment for any problems that may arise (e.g. different bacteria or stress due to cold concrete, ventilation or inexperienced staff). Please check with your veterinarian.

Records

It is imperative that accurate records are kept from the day of gilt arrival.

Pre-farrowing

Decide on what E. coli vaccine, if any, to be used. Set up an injection schedule. Pre-heat the farrowing room and check all equipment. Move the gilts into the crates at least one week before farrowing. Make sure all the drugs and aids are in place.

The nursing gilt ration should have high lysine levels. Making a tape of nursing and/or nosy piglets and playing it pre-farrowing may cut down on any savaging of piglets.

▪ Summary

With a gilt herd you will end up with more problems such as gilts getting out of stalls, irregular repeats, abortions, discharges, off feed, savaging, etc. Do not get depressed! It will get better!!

