

Advice on achieving genetic potential

by **Annabelle Hoste, geneticist, and Nigel Pritchard, production manager, JSR Genetics, Southburn, Driffield, East Yorkshire YO25 9ED, UK.**

For pig producers, selecting the right genetics is crucial. Making certain that their full potential is achieved is equally vital. A task that encompasses the entire production cycle from start to finish, it ensures that reproductive performance, growth efficiency and carcase quality are optimised.

The right genetics

It is essential to start with the right genetics – animals that suit your end market and will perform well in your farm's environment.

So, talk to the genetics companies. Find out about their breeding philosophies and goals as well as standards of health monitoring. The aim is to find a company whose way of working matches yours. Price should never be the sole priority. Look for a company that offers a range of genetic products.

JSR offer gilts that thrive indoors as well as hardy outdoor animals and sire lines that are tailored to a range of different markets, delivering cost effective production.

Once you have established your herd, keep genetic lag low with regular intakes of fresh breeding stock. When buying in breeding gilts, it is best to go back to the original breeding company where the genetics and health environment are already known.

Ensure boars are not kept too long: replace them regularly to keep up with genetic progress.

For those running a closed herd using AI ask your breeding company to recommend a carefully structured breeding programme and bring in both dam lines and terminal sire semen. Once you have your genetics in place, good on-farm management can ensure that your investment pays dividends.

Preparing the gilt

To realise genetic potential careful preparation of the gilt is essential. Get that right and you have set them up properly for life.



Firstly, when integrating into the herd, isolation and gradual acclimatisation over a six week period is recommended. Two weeks of total isolation then start to bring in some cull sows. This is also the time to vaccinate, so discuss potential disease challenges through vet to vet communication.

Being in peak condition at first service is also important for gilts and this should occur at around 240 days of age, in the third ovulation, with ad lib feeding, or 'flushing', commencing a minimum of three weeks prior.

Health and husbandry

With gilts in good health and condition, ensuring that genetic potential is achieved is about establishing the building's environment, sticking to husbandry routines and never being too complacent to keep checking.

Monitor temperatures and make sure the basics are right. The farrowing house should have a cool area for sows – to encourage them to eat – but a warm area for piglets. Also in the farrowing house check feeding scales and monitor feeds continually. With a feed sheet above each pen aim to increase feed amounts each day, feeding to individual appetites, yet as near to ad lib as possible.

To reduce stress only mix pigs at weaning and keep group sizes small – no more than 10-15, size matched. It means you can pay attention to detail and prevents dominant

animals getting more food. Strict biosecurity should always be maintained. JSR operate rigorous hygiene measures, from three pig free days before entry and showering, to feed lorries unloading outside the perimeter and disinfectant dips for other vehicles. Good biosecurity protocols must be set in stone.

Food and water

For genetic potential to be achieved correct nutrition is vital. For the sow during gestation a dry sow ration is ideal. During lactation, however, and from weaning to service, provide a specific lactation feed: higher in density, with high energy, protein and lysine levels it gives the nutrition required for ample milk production.

Feeding three times a day, from seven days post-farrowing is also recommended as this encourages feed intake. Water intake is also vitally important, so supplement the water nipple with a trough to encourage drinking, stimulate better milk production and also higher feed intake.

People – last never least

Last, but never least, is the utilisation of skilled, enthusiastic staff. Good people can make bad buildings work, but bad people can not make good buildings work.

JSR encourage training at all levels and reward initiative by promoting internally. Many join JSR as stockmen and go on to management level. JSR have developed their own industry recognised training scheme incorporating Certificates of Competence.

They have also recently reintroduced their apprenticeship scheme, taking on four new trainees. Attention to detail, good routines and teamwork are all crucial to running a successful pig unit and JSR benchmark their efforts by recording the performance of the pigs.

Average figures such as 26.3 pigs sold per sow per year, 12.5 born alive and 11.7 weaned per litter mean that efforts are rewarded and genetic potential is being fulfilled – surely, the aim of any commercial pig producer today. ■