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Gilt rearing: A feeding perspective

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Nutrition, health and management go hand in hand to achieve a high technical performance from the modern-day sow. Gilt and sow genetics is always changing and increased attention to the gilt rearing program is essential to achieve their higher genetic potential. In 1980 it was common to have gilts at 100kg with a backfat thickness (P2) measurement of 19mm, whilst today it is common to have gilts around a backfat of 11mm at this body weight. The below table indicates some of the goals to aim for when mating gilts. At the time of mating, the gilt is still growing towards her mature weight, which is reached around her 3rd or 4th parity.

How to get there

- The key to a good gilt rearing program is to monitor and control the body weight, backfat and age of the gilts, as these all go hand in hand.
- From weaning to a 30 kg body weight, a normal feeding regime is recommended.
 - From 30 kg to 140 kg body weight, growth should be restricted in comparison to the grower/finisher pigs. This will allow the goal of 140 kg at 240 days to be reached. During this phase, a higher level of minerals and vitamins will help secure the development of bone strength, junctions, lean growth and a good longevity.
 - From 100 kg to 140 kg body weight, it is important to control the backfat level. Growth to fast during this period is a risk for locomotory problems, especially when fed a finisher diet.
 - Two complementary tools to consider using within the gilt rearing program are backfat scanning and the caliper. Backfat scanning is a reflection of the energy balance of the pig and the body reserves available for the

Table 1. Targets for gilt rearing:

Attention points	Norm
Age and weight at 1st mating	> 220 days and > 140 kg
Backfat at mating: 1st parity	11 – 13 mm
Backfat at farrowing: 1st parity	15 –17 mm
Backfat loss during lactation: 1st parity	< 4 mm
Backfat at mating: 2nd parity	> 11 mm
Backfat at farrowing: > 2nd parity	14 –16 mm
Backfat loss during lactation: > 2nd parity	< 4 mm

*These should be fine-tuned according to your on-farm genetics. (Adapted from Provimi Manual, Sow Management - Best Practices to Improve Piglet Livability, 2017)

next lactation. The caliper measures the body development in general. It requires calibration for different genetics and takes into consideration backfat thickness and loin depth.

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Concluding remarks

A gilt is not a finisher pig nor a gestating sow, a gilt is the future for the farm. A gilt rearing program should include a well thought out feeding plan along with the monitoring and control of farm specific targets which will support the gilts' productivity and longevity.

*References are available on request.

Table 2. Nutrient differences when feeding gilts:

Nutrient	Gilt vs Grower	Gilt vs Finisher	Gilt vs Gestation
	<45kg	>45kg	>45kg
Energy	==	↓	↑
Lysine	↓	↓	↑
Fiber	==	↑	↓
Calcium	↑	↑	== ↑
Phosphorus	↑	↑	== ↑
Magnesium	↑	↑	↑
Vitamin E	↑	↑	==
Selenium	↑	↑	==
Biotin	↑	↑	==
Folic Acid	↑	↑	==
Zinc	↑	↑	==