

## Season 4, Episode 8: Gilt Selection & Sow Longevity

Matt Romoser, Swine Extension Specialist at Iowa State University, and Derek Henningsen, Gilt Flow Manager at JBS Live Pork, discuss the importance gilt selection and sow longevity play in your swine herd.



### **Lameness**

Lameness is the second largest reason that sows are removed or culled from farms. A high percentage of these females do not “pay for themselves”. The industry has transitioned to more group housing settings, which has made it easier for caretakers to quickly identify lameness issues. Caretakers should also be cautious on body composition for females that are too heavy and too light. Extra weight can be strenuous on the muscle in the skeletal system. In contrast, having not enough weight can cause that female to become “bullied” and experience more aggressive interactions from other females and be predisposed to an increased risk of lameness. Foot health is another important factor when considering lameness. Many farms are beginning to incorporate hoof trimming into their practices to help minimize lameness issues. Ultimately, lameness is one of the largest problems in sow longevity.

### **Other factors**

Some of the most important factors in gilt selection are age of puberty, vulva size, functional underline, body conformation, and type of housing. Age of puberty is not as commonly used as it happens when the gilt is older and most likely has already been selected for breeding. Research conducted at Iowa State University showed that larger vulva sizes were correlated with an increase in total born alive when comparing parities one and two. Body conformation is one of the most common factors when thinking about selection. Females need to have a strong skeleton to be selected for breeding. Breeding females should be stocked for breeding or having a lower stocking density than market pigs.

### **Challenges**

Selection is easily one of the most difficult jobs on the farm. There are many important factors utilized in the gilt selection process which require time, focus, and accuracy. Due to the lack of gilts available we as an industry are not always able to meet the mark of every factor when selecting our replacement females. There are many challenges within the selection process such as stocking density, flooring, and disease. If gilts are stocked too full, have sharp slats, or are infected with diseases such as Mycoplasma, the females could develop sore joints, legs, and feet. Soreness poses a great challenge for selectors because they are unable to know the true potential of a gilt.

### **Profitability**

Ultimately, maximizing profit and performance potential of sow longevity starts at selection. Gilt selection can be arguably the most valuable job on the farm because of its ability to create higher profitability. The farm’s success can be measured by the selectors as they are selecting for high quality gilts who ideally will last longer than two parities and end up paying for herself, making her profitable. This is essential when looking at today’s high input costs to raise these animals.

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