



Overview. In many respects, raising breeding females is “a step above” feeding and showing a market hog. While many aspects of selection, care, and feeding are similar to feeding market hogs, there are some additional considerations when raising gilts. Thousands of breeding gilts are raised by 4-H and FFA exhibitors each year in the state of Texas. As with market hogs, a breeding gilt project involves a financial, time, and facilities commitment from the family.

Questions to Ask. To adequately address your needs in exhibiting breeding swine, the following questions may need to be asked:

- What are your goals?
- What shows or time of the year will you exhibit the project(s)?
- Will you need assistance in locating and selecting your project?

Selection.

Age of Gilts. Each show will have a specific range of birth dates that are eligible for exhibiting. Be sure to check these prior to selection of your female. Generally, gilts are shown by age, not weight, so while it is a good idea to weigh on a regular basis and keep track of growth, it is not as essential as with market hogs, which are exhibited by weight. In general, the bigger the gilt is, the better. A high growth rate is considered desirable.

Breed. Most large shows have enough entries to exhibit each breed individually, although many smaller shows may combine the smaller breeds (for example, Chester Whites and Landrace). Some shows are specifically open to certain breeds and not others. When selecting a breed to exhibit, which show(s) the gilt can be exhibited in is an important consideration.

Quality Considerations. The current trend is for faster-growing gilts with plenty of rib shape and capacity. Other selection criteria include muscle, structural correctness, style and balance, and growth potential. A trusting relationship with the breeder is essential. Structural soundness is perhaps even more important in breeding gilts than in market barrows, since their genetics may be passed on to subsequent generations.

Where to Purchase Breeding Swine. The trend is increasing for more and more gilts to be sold via private treaty, although some gilts are still sold through auction sales. Gilts will generally weigh between 40 and 75 pounds when purchased. While there may be more selection and variety at pig sales, buying off the farm allows the ability to at least see the sow and to visit with the breeder about genetics, vaccination schedule, etc. When setting up a visit to a breeder’s farm, it is imperative to be on time (or at least call if you are running late), alert the breeder if you are visiting more than one hog farm that day (most will generally want you to wear disposable plastic boots or step through a foot bath), and always wait for the breeder before stepping into any barns or pens. If you need assistance contact your County Extension Agent.

Validation. There is currently no validation process for breeding gilts. Registration papers are used at most shows.

Refugio County Fair: Gilts must be in possession and on feed by the December Market Hog Validation date. You must notify your County Extension Agent or Agriculture Science Teacher that they are on feed.

Registration Papers. Unlike market shows, most breeding shows require registration papers. It is the responsibility of the breeder to transfer the papers to the youth exhibitor, but it is the responsibility of the exhibitor to verify that they have received the correct paper for each gilt. Each show will have specific rules pertaining to registration papers, including a specific transfer date. It is vitally important to read the show rules and check the registration papers because there is a lot of information on a registration paper. In order to avoid disqualification, some things to double-check are:

- Date of Birth
- Ear Notch
- Sex of Animal
- Transfer Date

Facilities and Equipment. Facilities need not be elaborate. The barn should have at least 20 sq. ft. of space per gilt, be well ventilated, well drained, and open to the south and/or east. A rectangular pen of at least eight feet wide and sixteen feet long would be sufficient. Shade is essential, especially with white pigs. Gilts should be kept cool during summer and warm during winter. Many exhibitors use fans and misters in the warm months, and heat lamps in the cooler months. Gilts may be kept on cement, dirt or wood flooring. While there are advantages and disadvantages to each, the pens should be kept clean regardless of flooring. Pigs can be destructive to equipment and facilities and care should be taken to avoid slippery flooring, sharp edges, etc. Portable feeders should be hung at the same height as the top of the shoulder of gilts being fed and cleaned daily. Most breeding gilts are individually housed to monitor feed consumption. Fresh water is the most important ingredient in feeding any type of livestock. Water troughs should be small so they can be drained and cleaned daily. If nipple waterers are used, flow should be checked on a regular basis. Other equipment needs may include a brush, show stick, pipe or whip, shovel, electric clippers with proper combs and cutters, syringes and needles, small portable feed trough, water bucket, show box, portable livestock scale, extension cord, heat lamp, and electric fan.

Nutrition, Management and Exercise. There are no magic feeds or diets that make champions. It is the total feeding program, including the feeding schedule, the exercise program, and the careful observation during the growing and finishing stages that makes a champion. The five basic nutrients are water, protein, carbohydrates and fats (energy), minerals and vitamins. County Extension Agents should recommend a balanced commercially prepared ration with a crude protein range of 16 to 20 percent. Do not constantly change rations and never make abrupt changes in the amount of feed being fed at each feeding. Breeding gilts should consume between four and 8.5 lbs. of feed each day, usually split between at least two feedings. Protein requirements decrease as the gilt grows. Exercise builds up endurance, tones muscle, and requires the exhibitor to work with the gilt. Exercising is not the same as practicing showmanship. Gilts should be walked several times a week for at least 20 minutes. Since gilts quickly learn the route and tend to race back to the pen, it is advantageous to change the route the gilts are walked often.

Health. The key to a healthy breeding gilt is the development of a preventative health program. It is a good to visit with the breeder to inquire about vaccination schedule. Erysipelas, atrophic rhinitis, circovirus, leptospirosis, and mycoplasma are a few viruses that should be vaccinated against. Boosters may be required. Pigs should be dewormed monthly, rotating types of dewormers to prevent resistance. At least one rotation should include either Atguard® or Safeguard®, as these products are the only ones that treat whipworms. Ivermectin is an injectable that also controls external parasites, such as lice and mange. County Extension Agents and exhibitors should utilize a local veterinarian to diagnose and treat diseases and develop a preventative health program. Breeding gilts should be observed daily for signs of respiratory infection, diarrheal disease, and lameness. State and federal laws and regulations concerning the use of drugs for livestock are established to protect human and animal health. When administering drugs, always follow label instructions, including the withdrawal time before slaughter. The use of a drug in a manner other than stated on its label is regulated by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration and may be done only under the control of a licensed veterinarian. Feed labels cannot be altered by a producer or veterinarian and must be used according to the label. Most Texas livestock shows have strict policies against the illegal use of drugs and will disqualify animals if such drugs have been used, including those considered “performance enhancing,” which may include any drug that masks a symptom, including, but not limited to: dexamethazone, aspirin, etc.

Fitting and Showing. Skin care is also very important for show preparation. Some shows are “water only,” which means that *only water* may be used on show day. Others may allow skin and products, such as oil for dark skinned gilts. Read the show rules carefully to know what is acceptable on show day. However, skin and hair care begins much earlier at home. Brushing should be started upon purchasing the breeding gilts, at least twice a week and increasing to daily. This trains the hair to lie down, removes dry skin cells, increases the natural oil

released by the hair follicle, and helps the gilt become accustomed to being handled. There are many different products that may be used to condition the skin, which are acceptable to use **prior** to exhibiting, while the exhibitor is working with his project at home. Oils may be used in the weeks prior to the show to condition the skin on colored hogs, but extreme caution must be used on white gilts. Never oil a white gilt and leave it exposed to sunlight. In fact, white gilts should be kept well-shaded throughout the growing period. Some exhibitors choose to clip their gilts prior to the show, while others decide against it. In general, hair on breeding gilts is kept longer than barrows. The trend in recent years is to keep $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of length or longer on the hair, just taking the ends off. This can be accomplished by using a #1 or #2 guard on the clippers. Showmanship clinics should be conducted to teach proper showmanship techniques.

Health Papers. Most breeding shows will require health papers that have been issued from a veterinarian within the last 30 days prior to the show. It is important to check with the show rules as to what is needed, as the requirements vary from state-to-state, and may change over time. Even breeding shows within the state of Texas may require health papers. Some tests, such as brucellosis, may require a few days to obtain results. The following is an example of what **may** be required:

- Brucellosis: All animals must be from a validated brucellosis free herd with the validation herd number and test date on certificate or be negative tested for brucellosis after (date 30 days prior), and test date written on the certificate.
- Since all states are Stage 5 of the Pseudorabies (PRV) eradication program, no testing is required for this show. If the animals come from a Pseudorabies qualified herd, it is required that this number and the last test date appear on the health certificate.
- Vaccination against Leptospirosis (6-way) including bratislava and erysipelas. The date of vaccination **MUST** be listed on the health certificate.
- All health certificates must list the following statements: no raw garbage fed, herd is not under quarantine for any disease and uses no PRV vaccine.
- A premise ID number is required.

Project Timeline:



Compiled By:
Michael Donalson
County Extension Agent
Refugio County
October 2013