

PERFORMANCE OF A NEWLY ESTABLISHED LARGE WHITE × LANDRACE GILT HERD WHEN HOUSED DURING PREGNANCY IN A SINGLE GROUP IN A STRAWED YARD AND ELECTRONICALLY FED

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A Large White (LW) × Landrace (LR) gilt herd was housed during pregnancy in one group at the National Agricultural Centre Pig Demonstration Unit. Group size eventually totalled 84 in a purpose-built strawed yard. Two 'Hokofarm' electronic feeders, activated by a transponder mounted on the collar on each gilt, dispensed the daily food allowance in one feeding visit by each individual in the group.

When mating to LW boars (in a service area) had taken place, the weekly batch of in-pig gilts was computer programmed to receive 1.8 kg/day of a high energy, 160 g crude protein per kg, sow diet. This food level was maintained until 21 days post mating.

From day 22 to day 93 of pregnancy gilts were programmed to receive a food level within the range 2.0 to 2.5 kg/day. Actual food level was adjusted to maintain adequate (but not excessive) body condition in relation to prevailing environmental temperature in the yard. Body condition was assessed by regular handling of all individuals within the group. Thermostatically controlled vertically operated curtains located along the two sides of the yard, after reinforcement to withstand wind damage, allowed effective temperature control. Recorded temperatures under the deep-strawed lying area were, as expected, substantially higher than those

above pig level in the lying area under cold ambient conditions.

Regular check-weighing of food drop weight proved necessary to ensure accurate food intake. Actual weight dispensed could fall to 5% below the programmed figure for the 3-mm diameter pelleted food.

From day 94 to day 107 of pregnancy food level was increased to 3.5 kg/day, but not all gilts took this quantity. Pre-farrowing gilts were moved out of the yard and into crates by day 108, when food intake was reduced to 2 kg/day on entry to the crate.

Farrowing performance as shown in Table 1 for the total of first litters produced between 2 March and 25 July 1986 has proved very satisfactory.

TABLE 1
Farrowing performance

Total farrowings (first litters only)	Average no. born alive	Average no. born dead	Average no. born mummified
105	10.56	0.52	0.13