

## Merry Christmas & HAPPY NEW YEAR

When the snow flies and the lazy winds blow (the kind that don't bother going around you, they just cut straight through you), spending time in a pig barn can be rather welcoming. It's not always the most glamorous of work, but it can be very rewarding work. As we know, one of the biggest challenges facing the hog industry is a shortage of workers. This has been a struggle for years, but it's even more apparent now as virtually every other industry and business is facing the same challenge. This winter edition of the AGC Outlook has some recommendations that may help in finding the employees you need. Also included are guidelines for boar and gilt management.

This past year has had its ups and downs, but know that all of us at AGC stand with you. Thank you for your business and support this past year. We wish you a blessed Christmas and a prosperous 2022.

Sincerely,



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## Labour Shortages

The competition for employees is reaching new highs. In Ontario the unemployment rate is down to 6.4%, but in the pig dense counties of Huron and Perth, the local rate is now below 3%. It's a similar picture across other pig producing areas of Canada. With such a small pool of candidates, finding one with the right skill set can be very difficult.

Higher wages can help get the right candidate, but there's more to it than just the money. Consider other aspects that will attract and retain employees.



What makes your farm unique and why would someone want to work on yours versus another? What's your work environment and culture like? Large corporations often provide employee benefits but so can smaller businesses through group plans. Think about other perks or ways to show appreciation. Sometimes even the little things can go a long way: new barn clothes to change into, a good coffee maker, or maybe regular meetings at a local diner. These may not seem important to you, but they may be to others.

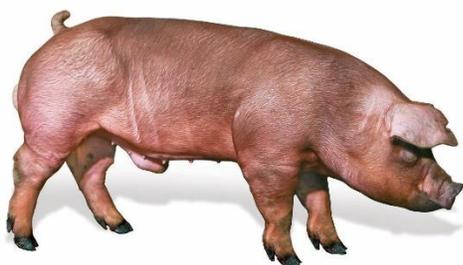
Have a close look at your barn entrance, as this is the first impression and what everyone sees when they start the day. A welcoming and comfortable entry area can be motivating. As a side benefit, a proper entrance encourages everyone to take the necessary steps for biosecurity and not rush the process. Lastly, walk through your barn from another's viewpoint. A clean and well-maintained barn with proper lighting and ventilation is beneficial for both the animals and the personnel.

The fact that pigs need care seven days a week may deter some candidates, but the working hours in a day can be flexible. Some people are early morning risers, some prefer the 9-5 schedule, and others are night hawks. Pigs appreciate care any time of day, so long as it's sufficient and consistent. That said, early morning breeding is still best, and gestating sows expect to be fed the same time every day. Electronic feeding systems can remove these constraints and provide more flexibility. So too can a batch farrowing system as labour requirements fluctuate throughout the batch.

Finally, pig care should be viewed as a professional skill with ample opportunity to learn, grow, and develop one's career. This is a progressive industry that uses some of the latest technologies and scientific findings to provide wholesome and nutritious pork for families in your neighbourhood and around the world.

## Natural Mating

The domesticated turkey has had such strong (and successful) genetic selection for larger breast meat that male toms can no longer mount and naturally mate with females. Artificial insemination (AI) is now their only means of reproduction. Pigs aren't there yet, but with most farms now using AI, there are no longer selection pressures on aspects important for natural mating. The AGC breeding program is an exception as we take a balanced approach to performance and durability. Animal height, feet and legs, and back-end conformation are all taken into account when selecting the next generation. As a result, our many customers who use natural mating see that AGC F1 sows can stand up to it.



For those who purchase boars for natural mating, or even for heat detection, there are guidelines to follow, just as there are for receiving gilts:

1. Purchase your boars early to give sufficient time for quarantine & acclimation. Allow additional time for the boars to settle in and get comfortable with their new surroundings.
2. Boars need to build confidence. Use a small and quiet gilt or sow with a strong heat for his first few services. An aggressive sow may lead to a reluctant boar. If the sow is too big, the boar may tend to mount her head instead.
3. Sperm may not be viable on these first services. Use AI or a proven boar on the 2<sup>nd</sup> matings to ensure pregnancy.
4. Bring the sow to the boar and mate in the boar's pen. Sows naturally seek out the boar when in heat (not vice versa) and there will be fewer distractions for the young boar. If needed, add a substrate to dry the floor and provide better footing.
5. Breed early in the morning before feeding. Don't use a boar with a full stomach.
6. Use young boars only occasionally. Gradually increase use until mature at 12 months. See table below for more detail.
7. Boars can be productive for up to 4 years, but by then they'll be too big for most sows and are more prone to health issues. Instead, cull boars at 2 years of age or younger to maintain genetic progress.

Maximum Usage/Boar	Daily	Weekly
Freshman (6-7 months)	1	2
Sophomore (8-9 months)	1	4
Junior (10-12 months)	1	6
Senior (>12 months)	2	8

AGC breeders are flexible and can supply young or already trained boars. They may also be DNA tested to provide exceedingly accurate breeding values and ensure you are getting top quality genetics.

## Gilt Development

Space is often a limiting factor in pig barns. This is one of the reasons for switching from natural mating to AI – semen bottles take up much less space than entire boars. The opposite sex, however, still often gets neglected as there is rarely sufficient space for proper development of gilts. This includes a separate quarantine building, acclimatization pens, pens conducive to boar exposure, and stalls for training and possibly breeding. A new build should include these spaces. Those with older barns may need to get creative with renovations or possibly receive gilts at a later age. This is where a trade off comes into play:

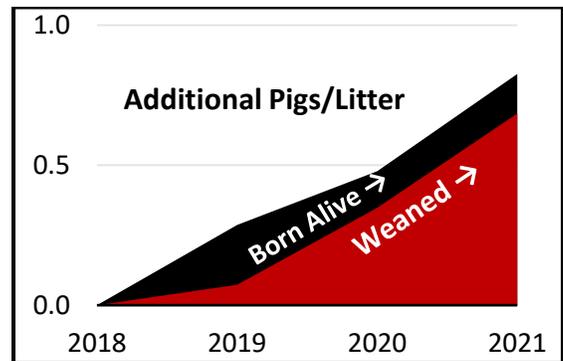


Receiving gilts at a young age allows more time for acclimatization. This can be critical for herds with health challenges. However, if the barn isn't set up properly, other aspects of gilt development may not be addressed. Receiving gilts at a later age allows your gilt supplier to house them for proper development. AGC breeders are flexible and can provide gilts across a wide range of ages. Most can also supply bred gilts which can help producers who are particularly tight on space. Purchasing bred gilts can also better guarantee pig flow.

Gilts are not to be treated like your average market hog. In addition to requiring more space, they also need special diets, additional vaccinations, and more of your attention. Take the time to examine them well every day and allow them to get familiar with you. This extra care will build the foundation for a long lifetime of production.

## More Weaned Pigs

Producers using AGC genetics are achieving great gains. Litter size at birth has increased on average by almost one extra pig within the last 4 years. More importantly, the number weaned is following a similar trend as piglet survivability remains strong. This is what genetic progress looks like.



To ensure piglet survivability holds as litter size increases, AGC is working with the Canadian Centre for Swine Improvement (CCSI) on a new research project. We'll be collecting additional data on our nucleus farms to better determine what factors play a role in piglet survivability and how to best incorporate them into our breeding objectives. This is a long-term project that will deliver important insight. Stay tuned!

If you aren't already working these highly productive animals and would like to, please contact any of the following:



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