



# FACTSHEET

## Breeding and Reproduction for the Small Holder Pig

Artificial Insemination (AI) is not a difficult procedure in pigs and has many advantages for the smaller breeder. As there is no need to have a boar then you save the cost outlay of an additional pig, and if you would normally borrow a boar then disease control is much easier as there is no movement on and off your farm.

### **Reproductive biology**

Pigs normally reach puberty at six months, although in the absence of others or in a more “domestic” environment, this may well be delayed. If after several months in a breeding situation, a sow or gilt does not show any evidence of oestrus, then there are hormonal drugs we can prescribe to your pig to speed this cycle up. Please call the surgery if this is something you are interested in. The length of gestation is 114 days, with a normal variation of two days. The breeding cycles occur all year round, with oestrus occurring every 21 days with a variation of one day. The number of piglets per litter is very variable, and is not only affected by the genetics of the female, but also by her age. The litter size tends to get smaller after six litters.

### **Artificial Insemination (AI)**

In order to carry out AI smallholders require training, which can either be done at agricultural colleges or at AI centres. Equipment is required which also can be obtained from AI centres. Naturally AI centres will have semen available from top sires and from most common breeds, but if semen is required from a rare breed or an exotic breed then this should be ordered in advance.

### **Pregnancy diagnosis**

The easiest method of pregnancy diagnosis is by noting whether the sow or gilt returns to oestrus at the next cycle (18 – 25 days); this is 85% accurate. However in a smallholder situation or when there is a single pet sow the accuracy of this method falls to < 50%. The external physical signs of pregnancy are fairly obvious in gilts after 60 days. The signs include; mammary development, enlargement of the abdomen and swelling of the vulva. The signs in sows are not reliable until about three weeks before term. Vaginal biopsy can be accurate after 36 days and is easy to perform if the sow is adequately restrained in a crate. An ultrasonic scan is best carried out after 45 days, and this is another really effective way to diagnose pregnancy.

**Please call the surgery if you would like any more info the reproduction work we can do for pigs**

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