

Feed pigs economically

NEWARK, Del. — Feed accounts for over 60 percent of the total cost of producing a hog. This is about average for a farrow-to-finish facility. Lower capital investment operations may invest even more of their total production in feed.

"Good nutritional programs aren't cheap, but they are an investment in good performance," says University of Delaware Extension livestock specialist Richard Fowler.

He says an effective nutritional program: is adjusted to meet the needs of different classes of swine; uses high quality ingredients; and reaches pigs in the same formulations developed on paper.

A pig's nutritional needs differ with its age and condition. Feed programs must be adjusted to meet these needs, Fowler says. A gestating sow, for example, requires a different diet than a finishing hog. Both need similar amounts of protein, but vitamin and mineral levels differ because a pregnant sow consumes only four or five pounds of diet, while a 200-pound finishing hog eats seven or eight.

Recent research at the University of Delaware's Georgetown swine unit indicates it costs less to produce gain on a 20-pound feeder pig with an 18 percent protein diet than with a cheaper 14 percent one.

Nutritional requirements are best met using high quality feedstuffs, Fowler says. Grain should be No. 2 or better. It should be free of mold, undamaged by heat or insects, have minimum foreign matter, and contain no more than 12 percent to 14 percent moisture.

"If you must use inferior or damaged grain," he says, "feed it to finishing hogs weighing 100 pounds or more. Don't feed moldy or damaged feed to your breeding herd or to young pigs."

Use vitamin-mineral premixes within three months of purchase. Some vitamins are damaged by prolonged contact with certain minerals, so, if possible, buy premix with the two ingredients packaged separately.

High protein feed ingredients differ in quality because of processing techniques and the condition of the raw product. Fowler says the urease test is an effective way to tell whether soybeans have been cooked enough to destroy the trypsin inhibitor present in the raw bean. Unfortunately, though, there's no quick, easy way to determine whether the bean has been overcooked.

"Avoid soybean meal that has many burned flakes," he says. "It may have lower nutritional value."

Feed swine diets within two weeks after they are mixed, he advises. "Imagine eating your favorite breakfast cereal after it has been out of the package several weeks. Too often we expect our hogs to perform effectively on feed that's old, stale and possibly oxidized. Keep feeders clean and dry."

In implementing a good swine nutrition program, it's also essential to get diets to the feeder as formulated. The National Research Council regularly updates and publishes the nutrient requirements for swine.

"We know the importance of using quality feedstuffs. The

challenge is putting them together in a palatable, productive diet," the specialist says.

Nutritional problems on commercial hog farms often occur because feed formulations on paper don't match those in the feeder, although they're supposed to be identical. Fowler says there are several possible reasons for this discrepancy.

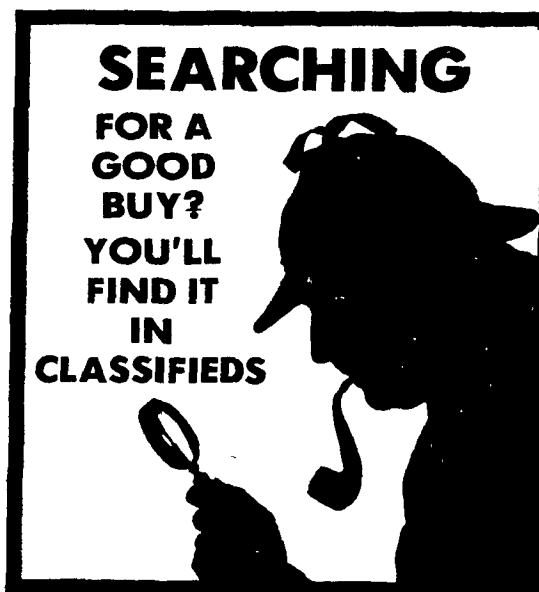
"The person doing the mixing sometimes gets the wrong information," he says. "Communication is a great thing, but we often fail to use it. Review your feed mixing instructions or formulation sheet. Are you putting in what the diet lists?"

If someone else is mixing on the farm, it may be worthwhile to check their procedure. Errors in weighing or mixing contribute to poor diets. New grinder-mixers have accurate scales attached. Models without scales probably depend on volume to determine weight. But does the volume of grain weigh as much as it's supposed to?

Using the wrong premix and distributing ingredients unevenly when adding them in small amounts are other causes of poor

swine diets. Is the premix being used for the class of swine listed? When growing/finishing premixes are used for the breeding herd, vitamin and mineral deficiencies usually result. Add smaller quantity ingredients near the end of the mixing process and blend for a short time — usually five minutes is enough.

Efficient swine production depends heavily on well formulated, carefully mixed diets. Review mixing practices to be sure they're giving accurate results. Fowler advises sampling the diet periodically and sending it to a feed lab for analysis of at least protein, calcium and phosphorus.



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