

# Start with nursery to improve hog operation

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The place hog producers should look at first to improve efficiency of their operation is the nursery, according to one swine expert.

"The conventional nursery is a place where little pigs learn how to grow slowly and catch diarrhea," says Dr. Ray Washam, manager of swine technical services for Ralston Purina Company. "Consequences of an inefficient conventional nursery are highly variable growth rates, high feed conversions and excessive mortality rates. These problems can be reduced or eliminated with the proper use of facilities and feed combined with careful management," he continued.

"Producers have to turn to modern nursery designs if they want to take full advantage of the growth potential of their pigs," said the swine researcher. Dr. Washam suggests wire flooring systems in decked or single level pen systems. "These systems are the missing link in hog operations that otherwise are efficient and productive."

Washam has tested various cage nursery systems since the early 1970s. "Each test confirmed what we thought — separate a baby pig from the dampness and disease found on the floor of a conventional nursery, and he stands a better chance of making it to the finishing floor. Mortality rates from these experiments were half of those in

conventional nurseries," Washam pointed out.

These tests also showed cage nurseries eliminated the lag phase in growth after weaning. "Average daily gain was 0.62 pounds per day with a feed conversion of 1.62," he continued.

The bottom line, according to the Purina researcher, was efficient, quick conversion of feed to pork. "Facilities using pigs in decks can take a pig from 12 pounds at three weeks to 25 pounds at six weeks, and on up to 50 pounds at nine weeks. They can also reduce mortality from the average of 4.0 percent to 1.25 percent or less. All this means extra dollars to the producer," he explained.

"The decks pay off, producing these results, when combined with a high energy feeding program and careful management," Washam continued. "A producer creating a good, warm, clean environment for his pigs should also use feeding programs that allow pigs to make best use of this environment."

Starter or nursery feeds, according to Washam, not only have to be high in energy content, but must be palatable. Producers, he said, must pay careful attention to the taste of feed and how it is presented. "A high energy ration is also a high fat ration like High Octane Pig Starter Chow. Pigs like fat — they are used to tasting it in a sow's milk. So nutrition and palatability come together in a

high energy starter feed," Washam continued.

"To maintain this palatability, feed should be stored outside the nursery, avoiding the warmth and high humidity of confinement," he explained. Other suggestions by Washam include periodic cleaning of feeders, resupplying them with fresh rations, and providing one feeder opening for every two pigs.

Even a sound, high energy feeding program cannot produce rapid gaining pigs if a producer does not spend sufficient time in the nursery, Washam added. "This is a very critical time in a pig's life, and it requires careful management to make the most of this phase in its development."

Washam has four suggestions for proper management. "First, a nursery should be run on an all-in all-out system. This unconfuses control of the environment within the swine house, minimizes illness, and eases cleaning of the building," he explained.

The second suggestion was to keep litters together, something made possible by an all-in, all-out system. "Classification by uniform weight reduces fighting and fighting wastes energy," said Washam.

Third, litters need room. "Pigs should have at least two square

feet each up to 40 pounds, and perhaps 2½ square feet per pig above that weight," he said.

Lastly, Washam recommended that all producers "observe pigs in the nursery at least once a day. There is nothing as good as watching them — a few minutes a day in the nursery can pay big dividends in successful

management," he declared.

"Facilities, feed and a producer's time and experience are all needed to make a nursery efficient," concluded Washam. "But producers should not expect the impossible. The only person who makes no mistakes at all is the person who never tries anything new."

## SCS cites LESA system

CHAMBERSBURG — The U.S. Soil Conservation Service has announced the release of a new Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) System, according to John Akers, Conservationist at the Chambersburg Office.

The LESA system can be used by townships and counties to determine which lands should be set aside for agriculture. In addition, the local government can rate a specific site and evaluate whether it should remain in agriculture or be converted to an urban use.

LESA is divided into two parts. In the first, farmland is evaluated for quality. To do this, each soil in the county would be rated on its potential to grow specified indicator crops. This information would be furnished by the Soil Conservation Service.

In the second part, particular sites are assessed for their economic and social visibility as farmland. Some factors considered are availability of water, sewer, transportation, compatibility with surrounding area and existing land use plans. These, plus other factors, are developed by each municipality giving them a tailor-made land evaluation system.

Akers stresses that this is not a federal land use program but is a system that each local unit of government can use to evaluate proposed agricultural land use changes.

Any municipality or planning commission may get additional information from the Soil Conservation Service at 550 Cleveland Avenue, Chambersburg, or by phoning 264-7013.




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