

Keeping up with prices can improve your profits.

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How many times have you sold a load of hogs to a local sale only to find out that hogs were selling better somewhere else? Keeping abreast of local market trends can increase the profitability of your operation.

Often one sale barn will be doing considerably better than another with regards to prices, and if you follow trends in the number of animals sold, that barn will be selling more hogs than the other markets. It pays to shop around for a good market.

Now I realize that the location of sale barns plays a crucial role in the price differentials needed to make extra traveling profitable. Fat hogs generally will vary little from sale to sale.

The week of February 10, for example, prices ranged from \$43 to \$49.75, depending on pig type (U.S. #1, #2, #3 or #4) and pig weight (200 to 325 pounds) at area markets.

The key is to know what type of hog to raise and at what weight to sell it. Generally speaking, a U.S. #1 market hog is the most desirable, and brings the highest price in the 210- to 245-pound weight range.

The more uniform the lot with regard to type and weight, the higher the price. Keep up on weekly trends in fat hog prices through farm publications. A two-cent price differential might not seem like much, but two cents per pound works out to \$4.50 on each animal sold.

If you normally sell 50 hogs each time you market, this two-cent price difference can add up to \$225. If you use your own truck and the higher market is 100 miles farther than your local market, is \$225 enough to justify your trucking costs and about five hours of your time?

In most cases, the answer would

be yes, but might vary depending on whether you own a truck or not, the cost of operating the truck and how much you value your time.

Price variations are even greater for feeder pigs. In the table below I've recorded price ranges per pound for 40-, 50- and 60-pound feeder pigs at three different sales.

Pig weight	Price At Sale Barn		
	A	B	C
40-49 pounds	\$.93-.1.05	\$.79-.98	\$.65-.72
50-59 pounds	\$.84-.92	\$.77-.96	\$.68-.71
60-69 pounds	\$.80-.85	\$.64-.75	\$.65-.70

These prices were all taken from a local paper and are from sales held on February 10 and 12.

What do these numbers mean? Obviously, sale A had the highest prices overall when looking at the lower price range in each weight class. And some variation in prices occurs at different pig weights.

Can you afford to drive the additional 85 miles from sale C to sale A for the price difference? This depends on how many feeder pigs you have to sell and what they grade. Price differentials for feeder pigs graded U.S. 2-3 or U.S. 3-4 generally do not vary as much as U.S. 1-2 graded pigs. But prices will still vary.

Using the low market prices between sale A and C, the price difference between 40-pound pigs amounts to 28 cents per pound or \$11.20 per pig.

At higher weights, like 60 pounds, the difference is 15 cents per pound or \$9 per pig. If you're currently marketing 20 pigs per week, this can amount to \$224 when you're selling 40-pound pigs or \$180 when you're selling 60-pound pigs.

These incentives grow as the number of pigs sold increases. If your normal load of 60-pound feeder pigs totals 60, then your potential increased income for traveling to sale A can total \$540. This is not chicken feed!

All too often we in the livestock industry sell our livestock to the most convenient sale regardless of price. The mercy of the market sometimes catches us off-guard and the result can be fewer dollars in the pocket. Not only does it pay to shop where to buy, but also when

to sell.

Here's a word of caution. Never get into the rut of constantly selling at the same sale. Never take for granted that sale A will always be the best place to sell your feeder pigs.

The logical approach is to study the market reports weekly and make your decision based on them. Though it's still no guarantee of profit, in the long run this strategy can help you make pig production more profitable.

Dauphin fruit operation is 1,000th Century Farm

HARRISBURG — A Dauphin County couple has added more than a century to Pennsylvania's family farming tradition by registering their farm as the Commonwealth's 1,000th Century Farm.

Mr. and Mrs. John A. Plouse received their Century Farm certificate today from Gov. Dick Thornburgh following his proclamation of March 20 as Agriculture Day in Pennsylvania.

Their South Hanover Twp. farm has been in the Plouse family for 125 years, a quarter century more than is required to qualify for Century Farm honors.

"One thousand Century Farms underscores the commitment of the Department of Agriculture and Thornburgh Administration to preservation of family farms and farmland resources," said Agriculture Secretary Richard E. Grubb.

Pennsylvania's Century Farms

program was established in 1976 to stress the importance of family farms by giving special recognition to families who've owned their farms for at least 100 consecutive years.

"The important role farm families such as the Plouses play can not be overstated," Grubb said. "The farm family is the backbone of our state and nation."

The "Plouses are among 58,000 farm families who've made agriculture Pennsylvania's leading industry, and Pennsylvania the leading agricultural state in the Northeast," he added.

Last year, Pennsylvania's farmers produced \$4 billion in products and, through agribusinesses and allied enterprises, stimulated more than \$30 billion in economic activity.

The Plouses trace ownership of their 94 acre farm to at least 1861 when it was farmed by David

Cassel, great-great-grandfather of Mr. Plouse. The Plouses raise pick-your-own fruit and cut-your-own Christmas trees.

"When you've got the soil in your blood, you're interested in such things," Plouse said of his decision to seek a Century Farm designation. He said that he hopes to pass the farm on to his children.

"Preservation of the family farm is what the Century Farm program is intended to encourage," Grubb said.

Grubb urged others who qualify to enter the Century Farms program. Farms must be owned by the same family for at least 100 years, be lived on by a family member and consist of at least 10 acres of the original holding.

Applications can be obtained by writing to Century Farms, Press Office, Pa. Dept. of Agriculture, 2301 N. Cameron St., Harrisburg, PA., 17110-9408, or by calling toll free 1-800-AG-PENNA.

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