

In Swine, Good Looks Won't Bring Home the Bacon

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NEWARK, Del. — Like many other rural youth, I grew up in the 4-H system and was a member of my county's judging team for a few years before assisting as a team coach. My experiences in 4-H (especially those related to judging) were responsible for my becoming a confident individual, able to stand up in front of a group to voice my opinions or present information.

One of the schools I attended had a strong livestock judging team, and judging was taught as a college course as well as integrated into most of the other animal science production classes.

Livestock judging, of course, is based entirely on visual evaluation. And this approach has some definite pitfalls — especially when you're selecting breeding stock.

I can't tell you how many times I've picked outstanding looking livestock at people's farms, only to learn that the animals in question were duds as breeders, milkers, or mothers. The same thing has happened with the sheep flock on my father's farm. It's a shock to purchase or select an animal with all the characteristics you're breeding for, only to be disappointed when the offspring arrives.

So my opinion on visual evaluation has changed. Don't get

me wrong! Visual appraisal is still an important part of selection; it's just not the most important part.

Performance is the key to a selection system — performance with regard to the number of offspring born and weaned as well as the performance of the offspring on the finishing floor.

Buying a boar without any knowledge of his performance, or at least the performance of his brothers and sisters, is like betting on a horse. Maybe you'll win and maybe you'll lose. There are never any guarantees, but if you select animals based on performance records, the odds will be in your favor.

The dairy industry is a good

example of how selection for performance can pay off. By utilizing performance-proven sires, milk production has increased steadily over the past few decades.

Now, I know what you're going to say. Look at all that surplus milk! What will they do with it? And I must admit, the dairy industry will have to solve that problem through increased sales or decreased production. But by increasing production per cow, costs are cut because fewer cows need to be kept for the same output of product.

If all dairy farmers decreased the size of their herds, a price based on supply and demand would prevail. Although a farmer would have fewer cows, production would remain the same and so would the milk check.

What about the swine industry? Selection based on performance can increase productivity (number of pigs weaned) or increase performance (feed per gain and growth rate). Selecting for performance in feed per gain, growth rate and carcass traits can improve the profitability of your herd without increasing your output of product. You can select for the traits that affect you the most.

Visual appraisal is important in determining physical defects, and only you know what defects cannot

be tolerated on your farm. It is hoped that good underlines and sound feet and legs will be selected for, but beyond that the numbers are the key.

It amazes me how many producers don't ask key questions when buying a boar — questions like: Have you performance-tested any of this boar's relatives? How did they perform? What was this boar's average daily gain to 200 pounds, feed efficiency, back fat?

By demanding this information, boar producers will be forced to keep performance records, if they're not doing so already. This in turn, will provide you with better, more accurate data to assist you in your selection programs.

Use visual appraisal to cull out undesirable defects and let the numbers be your guide to selection.

I've done a 180-degree turn around with regard to methods of selection. More and more boar producers are also implementing selection based on performance in their programs. As a matter of fact, a recent meeting was held to discuss the possibilities of implementing performance data along with visual evaluation in the National 4-H Judging Contest.

Who knows what the future holds?

Horses Require Clean, Dependable Water Source

CONRAD, Iowa — Water needs of horses are determined by many factors: dry matter intake, growth, work and lactation. Water deprivation can lead to digestive disturbances such as colic for horses.

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) notes that voluntary consumption of water by horses is two to four times the intake of dry matter. Also, water requirements rise 15 percent to 20 percent when environmental temperatures climb from 55 to 95 degrees.

Work may increase the water needs from between 20 to 300 percent and lactation, 50 to 100 percent above maintenance. The tissues of young horses contain 70 to 80 percent water, showing the need for water to grow.

Livestock watering manufacturers have designed equipment to meet the water needs and drinking

habits of horses, according to Leland Wiseman, chief operating officer, Ritchie Livestock Fountains.

Fountains with durability to withstand lot and pasture conditions, simple installation and easy access to working parts are on the market, says Wiseman. Most importantly, they keep water in front of horses at all times for good health.

"For maximum return on investment dollars, horse owners are encouraged to provide their animals with all the water they want," notes Wiseman.

The top 10 States in numbers of agriculturally related jobs in food and fiber are California, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Florida, North Carolina, Michigan, and New Jersey.

"Automatic equipment keeps fresh, clean water available 24 hours a day. Heated or unheated equipment is available to keep water flowing for a few dollars a year, even through winter's worst."

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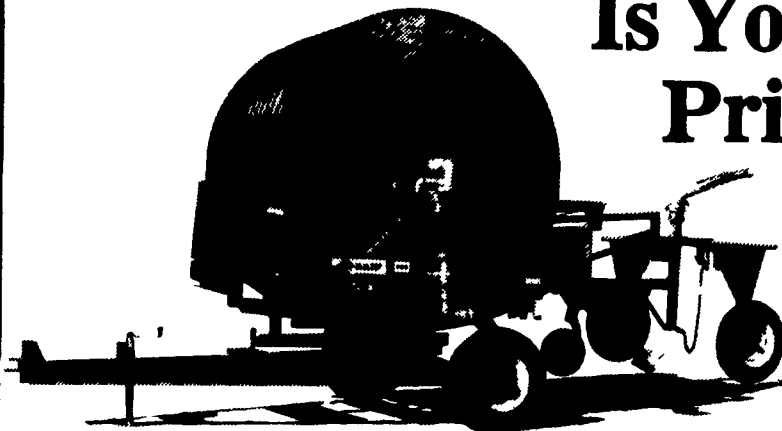
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