

Pork Prose

by
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A Call For Carcass Quality

"When one out of three market barrows from a selected group have loin muscle areas so small that they will not certify as meat-type hogs, it means the industry has a lot to accomplish in this day when keen competition exists for the lean meat sales to consumers." Dr. John Ziegler, professor of Food Science, Penn State University, commenting on the high percentage of hogs not certifying in the Keystone International Livestock Exposition carcass show.

"Because it's important to support our economy, most of the hams I buy are U.S.-produced. But I consistently find better quality hams from Canada. So much better that buying Canadian hams is more profitable for me, and they make it easier to produce an end product that will meet the low-fat specifications stated on the label." Werner Jonas, president of Dutch Master Meats, Harrisburg, PA, commenting on differences in quality between U.S. and Canadian hams.

Two powerful statements from two different people on two different subjects. But look at the common thread in both comments. Carcass quality is a problem; so much so, that pork from other countries and meat from other animals is a threat to our industry.

Is there any truth in what they say? Ziegler's statement on a sample of U.S. hogs is based on actual figures — which usually don't lie. Jonas' statement on Canadian pork is based on personal experience, which you might question. But on Nov. 20, I toured Dutch Master's facilities. Jonas showed me containers of Canadian hams and U.S. hams. Even to my untrained eye, it was obvious that the best quality hams came from our neighbors to the north.

How do other processors feel? I spoke with people at Kessler's, Inc., Kunzler and Co., and Berks Packing Co., Inc. — three major pork processors in our state. Most

agreed that Canadian hogs have the edge on carcass quality. They all felt that U.S. hogs in general needed improvement in quality.

I also spoke with Tom Hartsock, swine specialist at the University of Maryland. Tom spent several years in Canada. He agreed that the quality of the Canadian hog, at least in terms of fat cover, is superior to the U.S. hog. Two reasons for that. One, Canadian producers for years have selected for lean bellies, which also translate into lean hams. And secondly, any Canadian hog that's federally graded (most of them are) is paid on the basis of carcass weight and backfat thickness.

So if this problem is real, and I think it is, how do we solve it? The simplest answer is that hogs must be paid on the basis of carcass merit. Many producers, out of pride alone, will market a hog of average or better quality. But to produce a superior animal, it takes



Dauphin County 4-H'ers held their annual Beef Round-up recently at the Farm Show Complex, and Tim Foreman (left) of Hershey showed his steer to champion honors. Melanie Messick of Middletown captured reserve champion honors with her first 4-H project steer.

The champion heifer at the show was shown by Mark Foreman of Hershey.

price incentive.

Roughly 4,000 Pennsylvania hogs go to market each business day. While most buyers pay more for better quality hogs, Hatfield Packing has the only true grade-and-yield program in the state. The problem with all the buyers, Hatfield included, is that not enough is paid for the excellent hogs. And more importantly, too much is paid for the poor hogs.

For example, at most buying stations, the maximum price spread between a good hog and a poor hog at the same weight is about \$3.50 per head. Even with Hatfield's present grade and yield program, the difference in value between a "good" hog (76.5% dress, .8 in backfat) and a "poor" hog (73.5% dress, 1.5 in backfat) is only about \$2.70 per head.

Why is this the case? First, grade-and-yield programs cost money. Money for implementation, for operations and for special personnel. Case in point: Hatfield for more than a year has been re-working its grade-and-yield program. They've spent many thousands of dollars already. And Jerry Clemmens of Hatfield Packing tells me it could be another six months before the new program is in place.

The second hang-up with tough grade-and-yield programs is that they can be disastrous to the packer if the producers of the poorer hogs sell their critters elsewhere. Packers say volume is as important as quality.

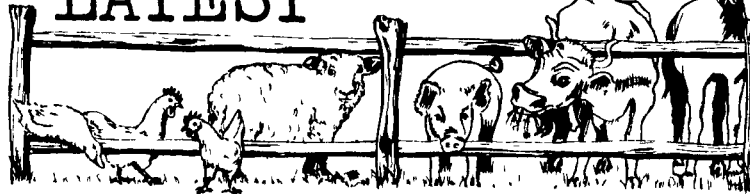
So is the situation hopeless? No. Grade-and-yield programs are appearing that place a \$10 to \$15 spread between the excellent and poor hogs. Wilson Packing and Hormel have new programs. The Pork Value Program sponsored by the National Pork Producers Council is a good one. Hatfield is working to improve theirs.

In 1968 only 8 percent of U.S. hogs had less than 1.5 inches of backfat. By 1980, that proportion climbed to more than 70 percent. So we've come a long way. But we have a long way to go. Imports and other types of meat still threaten the pork industry. This competition may be due in part to price, which is hard to change. But we seem to be getting beat on quality, too. That's a factor we can change.

FARROWING SHORT COURSE REMINDER

Penn State will offer a Farrowing Short Course Jan. 8-9, 1987. Registration fee is \$30 per adult, \$15 per additional family member, and \$15 per student. Mail registrations to FARROWING SHORT COURSE, 306 Ag Administration Bldg., University Park, PA, 16802. Make checks payable to The Pennsylvania State University

LIVESTOCK LATEST



Swine Course Offered

UNIVERSITY PARK — The animal science staff at Penn State, with staff from agricultural engineering, veterinary science, and agricultural economics contributing lessons, have written a course about swine.

Commercial Swine Production and Marketing, a correspondence course available from Penn State, is a comprehensive guide for the commercial swine producer or farmer with a hog enterprise.

This 16-lesson course includes information on planning and financing the enterprise, building and equipment, improving the swine herd through breeding, feeding and nutrition, marketing live hogs, and all aspects of swine health.

The course is available by sending \$14, including handling, to SWINE, Dept. 5000, University Park, PA 16802. Make check payable to PENN STATE.

USDA Reconfirms Ruling To Allow Pork Irradiation

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently reconfirmed its Jan. 15 rule allowing irradiation of pork for trichina control.

Public comments on the rule raised no compelling arguments or information that raised questions about the action, according to Donald L. Houston, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Houston said that low-dose irradiation of fresh or previously frozen pork is an effective way of controlling trichinae larvae, the parasites that cause trichinosis.

FSIS food safety specialists advise consumers to cook fresh pork roasts — irradiated or not — to at least 160 degrees F. to prevent other food-borne illnesses.

USDA's approval of pork irradiation followed that of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA has primary responsibility for assuring the safety of food additives, and USDA approves additives for use in meat

and poultry products. The sources of energy used in the food irradiation process, such as radioactive cobalt, are legally classified as food additives. FDA approved gamma irradiation of pork for trichina control in July 1985, thereby enabling USDA to consider its use.

"In developing its own regulations, USDA accepted FDA's determination that irradiation of pork in the approved dose range is safe," Houston said. "The public comments on USDA's regulations provided no significant new information."

USDA considered a total of 19 public comments on the rule, including nine that were received after March 17, the end of the 60-day official comment period.

No irradiated pork is yet being marketed, Houston said, because no company has satisfied USDA's stringent inspection and quality-control requirements for the irradiation process.

Cornell Testing 97 Bulls

ITHACA, N.Y. — A 140-day performance test for 97 bull calves from throughout the Northeast is under way at Cornell University to help breeders of beef cattle improve the quality of their herds.

The "Class of 1987" consists of 36 Follied Herefords, 21 Angus and Simmentals each, 7 Charolais, 5 Shorthorns, 3 Red Angus, 2 Limousins, and 1 Salers and Santa Gertrudis each.

These calves came from New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia.

William M. Greene is director of the test program and a beef specialist in the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell.

Greene said that the performance test offers beef cattle breeders the opportunity to acquire bulls with superior genetic and economically important traits to upgrade the quality of their herds.

Most of the bulls being tested will be sold in an auction scheduled for May 1, 1987, at Cornell's Livestock Pavilion on campus

Farrowing Short Course

111 Henning Building
University Park, PA
Thursday, January 8, 1987

11:00 a.m. Registration - 111 Henning

12:00 noon - Lunch on your own

1:00 p.m. - Welcome and Course Overview, Paul Wangsness, Kenneth Kephart

PRE-FARROWING PREPARATION

1:15 p.m. - Vaccination Programs, Parasite Control - Lawrence Hutchinson

2:00 p.m. - Feeding the Pregnant Sow - Kenneth Kephart

2:20 p.m. Break

MANAGING THE SOW AT FARROWING

2:30 p.m. Feeding Strategy for the Lactating Sow - Kenneth Kephart

2:50 p.m. Coping with the Sick Sow - Lawrence Hutchinson

3:25 p.m. Break

3:35 p.m. When to Cull, How to Select - Michael Miller

4:10 p.m. Keeping Your Farrowing House at Capacity - Kenneth Kephart

4:40 p.m. Sow Identification Systems - Michael Miller

5:00 p.m. Break for Supper

7:00 p.m. Practice With Sow and Pig Processing Techniques - Animal Maintenance Center, Kenneth Kephart and Michael Miller

Friday, January 9

BABY PIG MANAGEMENT

8:30 a.m. Prevention and Control of Baby Pig Diarrhea - Lawrence Hutchinson

9:10 a.m. Creating a Good Environment for the Baby Pig - Kenneth Kephart

9:30 a.m. Staying Ahead of Respiratory Problems - Lawrence Hutchinson

10:10 a.m. Selecting the Most Profitable Weaning Age - Michael Miller

10:45 a.m. Question and Answer