

Cashing In On Hog Farm 'Waste'

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NEWARK, Del. — The fall of the year always drives home some hard facts about agricultural waste to me. You see, as I drive up and down the highways in my job, I can't help but notice some of the sprouting grain in certain fields.

We all know that mechanical harvesting equipment will always leave some grain behind. However, when fields sprout greener than when the crop was present, something is definitely wrong with the harvesting equipment or process.

Similar types of waste can occur in hog operations. Perhaps the single and often the greatest waste is in feed. Wasted feed can add up to thousands of dollars of lost potential income, and the way it's wasted can vary.

Improperly adjusted feeders are the most direct cause. And almost all feeders can be adjusted to prevent waste. Feed should not be seen on the floor of the hog pen, and feeder bowls need not be full for optimum pig performance. Check the floors and under slots for wasted feed. If you find any, close feeder openings to adjust them.

Rodents are another cause of

wasted feed. My father always told me that for every rat you see there are 10 more that you don't see. Individually, rats and mice may not consume much feed, but when you consider large populations of them, the loss adds up. Besides what they eat, rodents routinely urinate and defecate in feed making it less palatable. This reduced palatability may be robbing you of hog weight gains.

The final feed waster I want to discuss is parasites. This is one of the most overlooked problems in swine production — mainly because the waste is not obvious. It's hard to notice the feed being wasted through parasites on the skin that are hard to see, or to ones that are impossible to see because they're inside the pig's intestines. Routine parasite checks and subsequent treatments can save feed by improving weight gains and feed efficiency.

Feed isn't the only thing that's wasted on hog farms. Another wasted resource is manure. Manure is a fertilizer and if properly used, can substantially reduce fertilizer needs. The keys to proper manure use are analysis and calibrated application.

To use it effectively, manure

must be analyzed for its nitrogen, phosphorus and potash content. Once you know what it contains, you can develop a program to calibrate and apply known amounts of manure containing known amounts of nutrients on cropland to reduce your commercial fertilizer needs.

Perhaps the most disappointing waste on a hog farm is the loss of piglets. When you consider that many sows have 10 or more live piglets at birth only to end up with seven or eight at weaning, the waste becomes obvious.

Saving piglets is not as easy as it may sound unless you're willing to spend extra time in the farrowing house. Assisting sows at farrowing can pay big dividends in increased weaning percentage.

I know of a producer who on occasion has achieved as high as a 14 live pig weaning average on a group of about 10 sows. That's almost twice the national average.

Saving pigs can be as simple as removing the amnion sac off a piglet at birth. Even though most sacs break before the pig emerges from the sow, occasionally they

are born encased in the sac. When the sac is not removed, piglets die from suffocation.

Another cause of piglet death at farrowing is chilling and weakness. Piglets are born with a very small amount of body fat. This makes it difficult for the pig to regulate its body temperature.

I've personally seen a piglet I'd given up for dead suddenly be brought back to life after being

held in a bucket of warm water for about 15-20 minutes. This piglet was lying motionless except for a pronounced gasping every 20 seconds or so. I would never have thought it would pull through, but it lived beyond 21 days.

I laugh at myself now for thinking that pig was beyond saving. Seeing a potentially wasted pig and saving it, might well be worth your time.

Pork Board Names Committees

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establishing long-range strategic planning for the industry.

Under the proposal suggested by the board, three members of the National Pork Board and three representatives of the National Pork Producers Council, would serve on the Industry Operating Committee.

Pork Board chairman, Virgil Rosendale, said the main function of the Industry Operating Committee "will be to coordinate the planning and use of producer-generated checkoff funds to make sure it's consistent with proper input. The committee will also assure that all the industry's resources are being directed

toward resolving identified industry issues in the most efficient manner possible," Rosendale added.

In other business at its December meeting, the National Pork Board adopted a report by a special Pork Board/NPPC committee that would establish a flexible but accountable system under which the Pork Board may contract with NPPC for specific services, as required. The arrangement, according to board executive director Simpson, "would permit the board to utilize existing industry resources."

The National Pork Board tentatively plans to hold its next meeting February 2-3, again in St. Louis.

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