

Pork Producers' Livelihood May Depend On Improving Herd Genetics

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"We in Canada have realized that through research, a pig must have 25 pounds per square foot," said Stein.

"Every square foot will only produce 25 pounds of pork per year." If over that limit by overcrowding, "you will not maximize your growth potential . . . and it will cost you dollars."

Real-time machine

To measure what types of hogs are producing the quality meat, Thames Bend makes use of a \$30,000 real-time ultrasound machine, which has given the company the advantage of not having to cut their best animals. By

using the technology of ultrasound, the breeders can examine critical packer concerns, such as shoulder depth of backfat, loin depth of backfat, loin eyes, muscling in ham, and others.

Also, Thames Bend is DNA testing to completely remove the porcine stress gene, which produces pale, watery pork, from all genetic lines. The stress gene costs the industry millions of dollars a year, he said.

Stein said his company has been living with constant changes in Canada for the past 15 to 20 years. He said that U.S. producers have a 20 percent advantage over cost of production compared to Canada. Housing, labor, and taxes are more

severe on Canadian producers, which has forced them to look hard into their genetics and management.

"For us to survive in this North American market, we've had to do a number of things differently," said Stein. Of two aspects they've looked at, one is producing a healthy pig that will grow quickly and very efficiently. The other is to produce the lean type of carcass that the consumer and packer are looking for.

"We as breeders can breed to whatever the packers' standards are," said Stein. "It may take a generation or two or three to do it, but we can meet their standards if they tell us what their standards are

— is it a seven-inch loin eye at 240 pounds? An eight-inch loin eye at 240 pounds?"

"It is a two-way street going between our packers, ourselves, and the consumers to know exactly what the consuming population wants. We can produce it."

Monitor herd health

Dr. Robert Graybill, swine practitioner in Lancaster County, spoke about the importance of monitoring and managing overall swine health and to keep "the herd has clean as we can," he said.

He said that, increasingly, the FDA is getting tough on producers using chemicals to treat disease. While some vaccines have proven

effective to preventing disease, producers should try to manage the herd to prevent herd health problems.

Tom Moyer, Hatfield Packing representative, also spoke to the producers about the changes taking place to put more emphasis on carcass weights and price quotations. Changes effective on the first of this month will further the company's commitment to carcass pricing:

- 161-200 pound desired carcass weight range, or a live weight range of 220-270 pounds. Carcasses less than 161 pounds are not eligible for lean cut percent premiums.

- One standard yield of 73.5 for all hogs.

- Carcass pricing will be stressed by showing only carcass weight ranges rather than estimated live weights, quoting sort penalties on a carcass basis, and showing a base carcass price.

- Average live price will no longer be included on the payment sheets.

Moyer told the producers that "change is difficult, even for me," he said. "But the fact is, we have to be willing to change to meet what the consumer is going to buy."

"It's not what we want but what the consumer wants."



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