

# Key Factors For Efficient Management Of Finisher Hogs

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — We need look back only a few years to find a swine industry that didn't take the finishing phase of production too seriously. In retrospect, it's easy to see why. The finisher hog seldom falls prey to lethal diseases that affect the baby pig. It will eat and grow on just about anything, including substandard diets. The type of housing was simple and the pigs still reached market weight. So, all-in-all-out production, precise feed formulation, and sophisticated ventilation were slow to come for the finishing enterprise.

We now recognize that the inputs and outputs of the finisher hog exceed those of any other phase of production with the possible exception of lactation. Into the finisher house, we pour feed, water, and young pigs; four months later, we have a barn full of market hogs and manure. When things go right, the productivity is maximized. But subtle changes in costs, efficiency, and output can have major impacts on the bottom line.

Here then is a list of factors affecting the finisher hog. Collectively they represent the difference between success and failure.

## Feeder Pig Health

There is no issue as important as this one. Begin the finishing process with a healthy pig, and you stand a good chance of success. Bring a pig into the finisher that is suffering from PRRS, Strep Suis, or Iletitis and it's possible to succeed, but not without a lot of effort.

## All-In-All-Out (AIAO)

Don't violate this concept. If your operation isn't set up for all-in-all-out, then get as close to it as you can. Creating separate rooms to accommodate no more than 3-4 weeks of production will reduce disease turnover and recirculation of pathogens.

## Use Pigs From a Single Source

Producers with AIAO systems have been able to tolerate multiple sources of feeder pigs. Unfortunately, the economics of hog production no longer permits us to simply tolerate an imperfection like this. If the system doesn't provide a single source of pigs, you should probably consider changing the system.

## Cull Early, Cull Often

There is a saying, "The first loss is the easiest one to take." In an ideal world, the poor-doing pigs will be culled from the nursery and not taken to the grower-finisher. Unfortunately, they sometimes show up with the rest of the load.

When they do, recognize who they are and give them a new home as soon as possible. Left in the barn, they drag down the overall weight gain and feed conversion.

Worse, they can shed organisms which alter the health of most of the remaining pigs. Most of the culling should be completed in the first few weeks after arrival, but this can and should be an on-going process. Check every pig. Check every day.

## Incoming Weight Uniform and At Least 45 Pounds

Incoming weight is especially important in systems that are compromised for any reason (less than perfect health, continuous flow, marginal ventilation). But in every situation, pigs with heavier starting weights adapt sooner, grow faster, and obviously reach market weight more quickly.

Keeping the pigs uniform also enables you to formulate the diet for a precise weight. This provides an opportunity to change the diet frequently, thereby maximizing performance and minimizing the possibility of over- or under-formulating the diet.

## Tail-Enders

After sending 80 percent of the pigs to market from your barn, take a look at what's left. If they're all approaching market weight, you've got a successful system. But if the leftovers range in weight from 140 to 200 pounds, you have a decision to make, and whatever path you choose will cost money. Send them at a light market weight and you'll take a weight sort penalty.

Wait for all the pigs to reach market weight and it may take another month. Or send the pigs to another, cheaper barn, and finish them out there. This eliminates eight penalties, but it adds to the cost of production. Minimizing the number of tail-enders should be a goal of production.

Minimizing the number of tail-enders should be a goal of every finishing producer. Each of the management strategies listed above are important steps to reaching this goal.

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