

Feeding Program Management Tips

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Hog prices have recently begun to come back to earth and soybean meal price has increased about \$60 per ton since February. These events signal it is time for producers to note that controlling feed costs is likely the most important management issue for the next 90 to 100 days.

As you review your feeding program looking for opportunities for improvement, remember there are several important aspects to good feeding program management. The key aspects are quantifying and monitoring your pigs' performance, selecting nutrient sources, formulating diets, implementing a quality control program, monitoring costs and comparing to expected goals, and minimizing feed wastage.

Initially focus on high impact aspects such as areas of greatest feed usage (e.g., grow-finish) and the most expensive diet cost factors (e.g., energy, protein and phosphorus). Evaluate lower impact factors once the major contributors are under control. Be sure to evaluate each factor in terms of its economic value.

There are several possible measures of feeding program economics. Feed cost per ton is the worst measure you can use, because it gives no consideration to pig performance or revenue. Better measures are feed cost per pound of gain, feed cost per pig marketed, or profit per pig. The best measure is returns per pig space.

Specific tips on how to ensure your feeding program is economically sound are presented below.

1. Shop around for sources of nutrients that pigs need, that is, amino acids, minerals, vitamins, and energy. That means you may switch, for example, from a supplement to a base mix, or from corn to wheat midds, fat, milo, or distillers dried grains with solubles. You might want to replace some soybean meal with meat and bone meal or crystalline amino acids.
2. When you comparison shop have specific standards in mind, that is, dietary lysine levels, that you want in a feeding program so you can make valid comparisons. Nutrient recommendations from the University of Nebraska are available at <http://ianrwww.unl.edu/pubs/swine/ec273.htm>
3. Place a realistic value on convenience and service from feed suppliers as you decide whether to use a complete feed, supplement, basemix, or premix as a method of supplying your pigs nutrients.

4. Be sure that each ingredient you use in feed supplies either nutrients in quantities that pigs need (not more or less) or has consistently improved feed efficiency, daily gain, reproductive performance, or carcass merit. Some producers still use ingredients in feed that are not necessary, do not consistently improve performance, or provide excessive levels of trace minerals and vitamins.
5. Take steps to tailor diets to **your** pigs under **your** production situation to reduce chances of under and over-feeding nutrients. That means knowing your pigs' rate of fat-free lean gain, feed intake and 21-day litter weight and adjusting diets accordingly. Tools on how to quantify pig performance and relate that to nutritional needs are found at <http://ianrwww.unl.edu/pubs/swine/ec273.htm>. Simply knowing the breed or genetic source of the pigs and feeding accordingly is not very accurate.
6. Be careful about overfeeding nutrients after pigs reach about 190 lb. They eat about one-third of their total feed needs during this time and their daily lean gain is decreasing.
7. Budget feed, that is, switch pigs to the next, lower nutrient-dense diet in the sequence after they have consumed a certain amount of each diet instead of guessing their weight and switching.
8. Split-sex feed, that is, provide barrows diets containing a lower amount of amino acids than gilts especially after they reach about 80 lb.
9. Phase feed, that is, offer at least seven different diets to pigs from weaning to slaughter.
10. Carefully evaluate the use of growth promoting levels of antibiotics during the growing-finishing period. Consider how likely the increased cost of the antibiotic will be recovered by improved pig performance.
11. Offer diets with an average feed particle size between 650 and 750 microns. Expect to improve feed efficiency about 1.2 % for each 100 micron reduction in particle size. A 1.2% change in feed efficiency represents about \$.50/pig. If 6 months or more have elapsed since you last sent a feed sample to a laboratory for particle size analysis do it today.
12. Use replacement boars and gilts that are selected for increased rate of lean growth. The energy cost of producing fat is about four times greater than that for lean growth.
13. Improve the health status of your pigs. Nutrients used to battle disease problems are not available for lean growth. Thus, the nutrients are "wasted". All-in/all-out management is a big factor in keeping health status high.
14. Establish an euthanasia program for the operation or review the current one with your veterinarian and employees. Very poor performing pigs consume a significant amount of feed and medications so they should be humanely euthanized.

15. Join with other producers and purchase ingredients in large quantities to qualify for volume discounts. Put aside differences in opinions about feed ingredients and feeding strategies that don't make any difference to the pig.
16. Investigate buying ingredients in bulk rather than bagged.
17. Evaluate having your feed pelleted if it is toll milled. Pelleting a corn or milo-soybean meal diet improves feed efficiency by 5 to 8%. Pelleting more likely pays off when feed price is high.
18. Pay attention to realistic feed cost targets and know your herd's feed efficiency, daily gain, feed cost/cwt of pork produced, and return over feed costs. Benchmark as much as possible to pinpoint where improvements are needed.
19. Reduce feed wastage by being diligent in keeping feeders adjusted. In general, aim to have less than 50% of the feeding pan covered with feed.
20. Consider that the lowest feed cost/cwt of pork produced does not always result in the most profit. In other words, feed cost/cwt of pork produced does not always point to the most profit-generating decision in a nutrition program. A more accurate approach to make nutritional decisions is to use partial budgeting where cost and revenue figures are evaluated.
21. Strive for open communications between you and your feed supplier(s). Having a relationship which is based on open communication will more likely lead to success when questions or problems arise.
22. Establish a feed quality control program whether feeds or feed ingredients are purchased, home-grown or home-mixed. Monitor key physical and nutrient attributes of the feeds and ingredients. More details are available at <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/swine/g892.htm>
23. Consider setting the price of feed ingredients in advance to help manage input price risk (i.e., forward basis contracts, formula price contracts, options contracts, futures contracts or forward cash contracts).
24. Establish methods of purchasing and delivering feed and feed ingredients to minimize the risk of infectious disease introductions.
25. Use well-designed and carefully selected on-farm research trials to supply information which is unavailable elsewhere and is critical to making decisions about a feeding strategy. A publication on how to conduct on-farm feed trails is available at <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/swine/ec270.htm>

26. Estimate total costs (fixed and operating) associated with feed manufacturing on farm and compare to a custom rate. Some producers are better off not manufacturing their own feed on the farm, because it can be done for significantly less expense if toll milled.

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