



**Market access**

An important factor for producers to consider is market access. A uniform, high quality product that meets specific criteria in sufficient volume to be processed efficiently will be necessary for future market access.

**Provide a better product**

Networking allows producers to provide processors and the end consumer with a better product. Producers with similar genetics, nutrition, and health programs and facilities can pool their hogs to fit the needs of the processor and generate real value to the pork sector. The network must provide the processor something of value and not available otherwise.

**Focus their operation**

Networking allows the producer to concentrate on specific phases of an operation. In a group marketing network, the producer does not have to worry about calling to receive the best price for pigs. Someone is already doing that. In a purchasing network, someone else is pricing your feed inputs. If the group is producing their own replacement gilts, time is no longer required in selecting females, breeding for maternal lines, etc. This frees up producers' time allowing them to concentrate on other phases of their operation.

**Acquiring information**

Networking can open up avenues for acquiring information that would not be available to many independent producers. When producers share information within the group, additional knowledge will give competitive advantages to the members. According to many group members, networks make it easier to adopt new technology. Regardless of the type of network a producer is considering, they should not underestimate the benefits of sharing information. Tips on nutrition, herd health, facilities and other management techniques can be exchanged. A producer can gain access to records, computer programs and consultants that otherwise might not be available.

**Limitations of networking**

Despite the many advantages, networks do have limitations. It's not easy to ensure all members are committed equally to the same goal. Formal business procedures are important and these may intimidate

some people. Most groups rely on joint responsibilities, which can be a problem. After joining a group, producers may lose access to some markets and suppliers that they have used in the past. There will be times that a producer's obligation to a group may be a burden. In most groups, a financial commitment is required by its members, and each producer member must be sure they can handle the commitment. A producer must be aware that the financial status of other members may affect individual profits.

**What networking isn't**

Part of understanding an idea is to know what it is not.

- Networking is not a cure-all for poor managers or a sure way to succeed. Many of the most promising aspects of working together involve undertaking shared risks. Risks mean the potential for failure. Because the essence of networking is entering into a relationship with others, misunderstanding and disagreement can lead to dissolution.
- Networking does not offer easy solutions to complex problems. It may however offer feasible solutions where no other possibility existed.
- Networking is not the poor, last ditch hope . . . the humiliating sacrifice forced on small producers as a penalty for their smallness. Neither is networking the only possible solution left for small- and medium-sized producers if they are to survive.
- Networking is not an additional burden for independent producers. Gaining access to markets, information, financing and technology may be possible without explicit networked solutions. Networked solutions are developed and exploited by the largest producers in the industry and represent a portion of the total set of potentially successful strategies at the disposal of today's producer regardless of their size. They hold special opportunities however for those whose size denies them certain advantages.