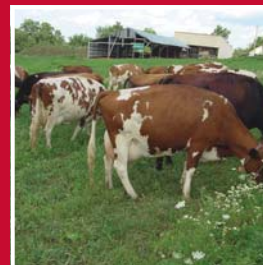


FIELD & FEEDLOT



ISU EXTENSION—NORTHWEST REGIONS

DECEMBER 2011 ISSUE

Extension Web Sites

Ag Decision Maker

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/>

Beef Center

<http://www.iowabeefcenter.org/>

Manure Management

<http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/>

Pork Center

<http://www.ipic.iastate.edu/>

ISU Extension Dairy Team

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/DairyTeam/>

When Evaluating Swine Performance, "It Depends"

By Matt Swantek, ISU Extension Swine Field Specialist

I have had many interesting conversations the last couple of years in regards to pig performance and results, when I am asked about records and benchmarks. Strangely, these questions do not come from those who have been keeping records, but rather from those who don't.

This is probably best illustrated, when meeting with a family discussing business plans and records with a family that wanted to bring in the son's into the business. After several attempts by the father to determine who and how records were going to be kept, but being stonewalled by his sons, he turned the discussion to current management trends. Having just completed a nutrition class the oldest son started asking about how to decrease their feed costs. The Dad only smiled, when I responded that "it depends" but in your case it doesn't matter. Puzzled the young man tried to press his points, but I interrupted him stating that if he wasn't going to keep records and use them as part of their business plan it really did matter. How would any changes in their management practices be evaluated and sound decisions made?

So for him it was going "to depend" on how he (or dad) was going to explain the expansion plans to the lender and whether the lender felt comfortable and had the confidence in lending the money.

Attending the International Swine Feed Efficiency Conference I was reminded again the importance of having good accurate records and understanding how to use them to gain better business efficiencies in livestock production.

A larger integrator began the conference speaking about the importance feed efficiency and what just a small improvement in feed

utilization monetarily meant to his group. He continued on to state that because of their size and scale that it was difficult for them to quantify a strong relationship between average daily gain (ADG) and feed efficiency.

As feed efficiency is only a calculation of intake and gain there should be a high relationship between these two. But within their production system there other factor may be influencing feed efficiencies. Differences may be dependent upon other factors such as genetics, feed quality, age of facilities, expertise of the caregiver, days on feed, start weight, end weight, seasonal effect, etc which may not have been identified yet.

Without accurate records, the ability to "predict" outcomes and develop business strategies is limited. Any change made can be well thought out and evaluated in advance not only on performance but economically as well. For those using records "it depends" takes a different meaning which isn't based on pig performance but rather what direction they choose to move forward with.

Mega Trends in Agriculture

By Kris Kohl, ISU Extension Ag Engineer

The World is changing and Iowa farmers have adapted to meet the past challenges and should position themselves for the next decade. The program is planned for Dec 21, 2011 from 10:00 am until 3:00pm at, 824 Flint Drive, Buena Vista County Extension office in Storm Lake and will explore the big picture of what is happening in agriculture.

The Mega Trends program will examine the following trends:

- The World Economy and How Iowa fits in
- Ethanol oil and Corn "The fight between feed, food, and fuel"
- The changing environment CO2 – Friend or Foe. Will Iowa be a winner or loser, and what will Iowa farmers need to do to be the winners?

Iowa State University Extension Speakers include:

- Dr. Chad Hart – Economist and Grain marketing specialist
- Tom Olsen – Farm Management
- Dr. Kris Kohl – Agriculture Engineer

The cost for the program is \$30 a person or \$40 a couple which includes lunch. To register call the Buena Vista County Extension office at 712-732-5056 by December 19.

Farm Employee Management: Do We Need an Employee Handbook?

Melissa O'Rourke – ISU Extension Farm & Agribusiness Management Specialist morourke@iastate.edu 712-737-4230

Whether your farm has two employees or twenty-five, it is important to be consistent in communications with workers about expectations and conditions of employment. One tool that can assist in this task is a written employee handbook or policy document. Such a written document can be short and simple or highly detailed, depending on your needs. What could an employee handbook do for your farm operation?

Provide background information about your farm. An employee handbook can be a tool to share information with your work team about your farm's history and background, as well as your values and vision for the farm. When employees know a little about the history of the farming operation, it helps them to understand the organization that they have joined. Hopefully, you have given some thought to your core values and vision for the future of your farm. Writing a farm mission statement could be the entire topic for another article – but, here's an example: *We are a family-owned and -operated farm. We value rural life and are committed to keeping our rural community vital. We strive to care for the environment and produce the highest quality livestock and grains that will be used to feed people in America and around the world.* This kind of a statement helps your workers to understand what is important to you in your farming operation. Whatever your farm vision, share it with your employees.

Outline work rules, standards of conduct, and other information that lets employees know what is expected of them. Most of us like to know what is expected of us. New employees have questions as basic as what to wear, where to park, where to eat lunch, and the location of restrooms. Workers like to know what their work schedule will be or where it will be regularly posted. Basic information about safety policies and training can be outlined in an employee handbook. Do you have other policies, such as “no smoking”? Think about some of the most “frequently-asked-questions” on your farm – and that information might well be outlined in an employee handbook document.

Provide information about pay and benefits of working at your farm. Workers like to know when and how often they will be paid. They may wonder if they will have the opportunity to earn a raise or bonus. If you offer any benefits, the employee handbook is the place to outline those details. Even benefits such as the opportunity to obtain farm-raised meat could be mentioned in the employee handbook. Employees like to know how and when their work will be evaluated and the employee handbook is a good place to share this information.

Confirm information about the legal relationship with the employee. The law in Iowa (as in most states) is that the employment relationship is “at-will.” Be sure that your employee handbook does not create a contract with the employees. In fact, it is recommended that employee handbooks contain clear a clear statement

that employment at will is the policy of your farm. Here is a sample statement: *Our Farm does not offer guaranteed employment. Either the Farm or the employee can terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause, with or without notice. This is known as “employment at will.” This employment at will relationship exists regardless of any other written statements or policies contained in this Handbook or any other documents or verbal statements. Also, while we may choose to discipline employees in an attempt to improve work performance when necessary, the Farm is not obligated to do so.*

While you can use posters to provide certain information that may be required by law, an employee handbook is another good place to do this. Have employees sign a simple document stating that they have received the employee handbook and reviewed all the policies contained in it. Then keep the document on file, just in case you ever need to prove that the employee received the written policy document.

Do not use the employee handbook to replace good communication practices. Remember that nothing can take the place of good interpersonal communication in the workplace. New employees need orientation and training, and seasoned employees need updated training, motivation and feedback. An employee handbook is a good reference tool and guideline. But it should not take the place of regular farm meetings, training and face-to-face feedback – both positive and constructive.

Looking for more information on farm employee handbooks? If you are considering writing or updating an employee handbook or policy document, resources are available. Go to the AgDecision Maker website and print a copy of File C6-58: Checklist for Iowa Agricultural Employers – available at www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/wholefarm/html/c6-58.html A list of links and resources can be found there which include discussions and templates for farm employee handbooks. Have your document reviewed by a legal professional who is experienced in employment law.

Future articles will continue to address other farm employee management issues. In the meantime, feel free to contact me with any of your farm employee management questions.

SAVE THE DATE: February 1, 2012 for Ag Decisions 2012—Agricultural Risk Management and Outlook Event in Sioux Center, IA

Melissa O'Rourke – ISU Extension Farm & Agribusiness Management Specialist morourke@iastate.edu 712-737-4230

February 1, 2012 has been set for a major event focusing on agriculture in northwest Iowa.

Producers and agricultural support industries in the region will not want to miss this event intended to focus on risk management strategies and the agricultural outlook in northwest Iowa.

The event will be held in Sioux Center at the New Life Reformed Church conference center.

Ag Decisions 2012 will feature a keynote address by Jason Henderson, vice president and Omaha Branch executive with the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Henderson serves as the Bank's regional economist and leads several Bank and Federal Reserve System efforts to track agricultural and rural economies. He also manages the Main Street Economist, a bi-monthly publication covering economic issues affecting rural areas. Jason speaks frequently to a wide range of business, financial and policy audiences across the United States and internationally. His articles on the rural economy have been cited by policy officials, researchers, and various media outlets, including The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Financial Times, and USA Today.

Ag Decisions 2012 will also feature breakout sessions on ag outlook and risk management topics of interest to producers and agribusiness interests. A detailed agenda will be in the next issue of Field & Feedlot.

For more information, contact Farm & Agribusiness Management Specialist Melissa O'Rourke at the Sioux County Extension Office (712-737-4230) or e-mail morourke@iastate.edu.

Fall SubSoil Moisture Survey in NW Iowa

By Paul Kassel, ISU Extension Field Agronomist

Iowa State University Extension has completed their fall survey of subsoil moisture in northwest Iowa. Field Agronomists Paul Kassel and Joel DeJong sample subsoil moisture levels in predetermined sites in many northwest Iowa counties.

The level of subsoil moisture as of November 1, 2011 ranges from 0.0 inches of moisture in Monona county to 5.6 inches of plant available moisture in Sioux county. The average subsoil moisture level was 3.3 inches for the fifteen subsoil moisture sites in northwest Iowa.

Much of the area had favorable levels of soil moisture in mid-summer. However, rainfall since July 15 has been about nine inches below normal. Typical rainfall from July 15 to November 15 would be about 12 inches. Rainfall has been about 2.0 to 4.0 inches in many northwest Iowa locations from July 15 to November 15.

Typical Iowa soils have the potential to hold from 10.0 to 11.0 inches of moisture in the top five feet of soil. The average fall level of subsoil moisture ranges from 4.3 inches in Lyon county to 6.0 inches in Pocahontas county.

The results from many of the sites showed that the soil had 4.0 to 5.0 inches of plant available moisture this fall. The initial reaction may be to question that amount of reserve moisture remaining in the soil since there has been so little rainfall since mid-summer. However, some areas received some late August rainfall. Also, the corn and soybean crop did not use much soil moisture past mid-September. A frost event on September 15 effectively brought the growing season to a close and the crop used little soil moisture after that date.

This level of subsoil moisture is very low when compared to levels of subsoil moisture the past few years. Therefore, the area will be very dependent on rainfall this fall and next spring. There is more concern if rainfall is not received this fall or next spring. Crop production will then be very dependent on summer rainfall without a reserve of soil moisture going into the summer crop growth time period.

Rainfall during November, March and April will also contribute to subsoil moisture. Typical rainfall for those months is three to five inches. We can expect about 80% of that rainfall to contribute to subsoil moisture reserves.

The lack of fall rainfall has made the surface soil conditions difficult for fall anhydrous ammonia application. However, from a strictly agronomic perspective, this fall has been excellent for ammonia application. The dry soil profile will hold several inches of moisture before leaching conditions occur. Leaching conditions – meaning that tile drains are removing excess moisture – will not occur until several inches of rainfall occur next spring or early summer. This means that the odds of losing any nitrate nitrogen due to leaching are not real great – and that fall applied nitrogen will be present in the soil profile for the 2012 corn crop.

Beef News

By Beth Doran, ISU Extension Beef Program Specialist

Comparing Feedstuffs – I've had several phone calls about which feedstuff is a better buy. The first question is "why you are feeding it?" Is it primarily an energy source or is it a protein source? This is important because to compare feedstuffs, they need to be compared on the cost of nutrient (energy or protein) on a dry matter (DM) basis.

To determine the cost of nutrient on a DM basis, you can use the following equation: $(\text{Cost/ton as-fed} \div \% \text{ DM of feedstuff}) \div \text{Nutrient Value of feedstuff} = \text{Price per ton of nutrient on a DM basis}$.

For example, you want to compare whole shelled corn (\$6.10/bushel or \$217.86/ton) versus wet distillers grains (\$70/ton). The DM and energy content of the corn is 85% and .70 Mcal/lb. For wet distillers grains, it is 35% and .75 Mcal/lb.

Price per ton of energy in corn (DM basis) is $(\$217.86 \div .85) \div .70 = \366.15

Price per ton of energy in wet distillers grains (DM basis) is $(\$70 \div .35) \div .75 = \266.67

Per pound of energy (DM basis), the corn would be \$.183; the wet distillers grains would be \$.133. In this example, the wet distillers grains is the cheaper energy source. However, there are additional things to consider - cost to deliver the feedstuffs to the location, storage loss, maximum inclusion rate, how it compliments other feedstuffs and mixing capability. To compare true cost, the total cost of the ration should be calculated and based on comparable animal performance, such as gain.

POCAHONTAS COUNTY

More Beef News

Get a Construction Permit! – Any feedlot planning to apply for an NPDES permit needs to get a construction permit from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) **BEFORE** building any required run-off control structures. Once the construction permit is granted, an engineer is required to be present while run-off controls are being installed and certify the construction.

If you build the controls before obtaining the construction permit, you will NOT be able to get the NPDES permit. This is because there was no engineer on site to certify that the run-off controls were built to standard.

Winter Feeding Areas – Be careful about where you locate your winter feeding areas. To prevent run-off and potential pollution, select areas that are flat and a long distance from a water of the state. Polluting a water of the state is illegal, regardless of the size of the operation.

New Publications – Check out these new ISU publications at the following websites:

Monthly Cattle Feeding Returns (B1-36) <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/livestock/pdf/b1-36.pdf>

Historic Cattle Prices -10Year Summary (B2-12) <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/livestock/pdf/b2-12.pdf>

How to Interpret Your Manure Analysis (PM 3014) <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/>

Cow-Calf Production in the U.S. Corn Belt (MWPS-66) – This must be ordered and can't be downloaded. <http://www.mwps.org/>

Upcoming Programs – Mark your calendars now and plan to attend any or all of the upcoming beef programs!

Iowa Cattlemen's Convention – Dec. 12-14, Altoona; **Feedlot Forum 2012** – Jan. 17, Sioux Center; **Heifer Development Workshops** – Jan. 25, Rockwell City and Feb. 6, Spencer; **Iowa Beef Expo** – Feb. 12-19, Des Moines; **Dry Manure Applicator Certification Workshops** – Feb. 22, Orange City and Feb. 23, Storm Lake

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