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CLIPPINGS

A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

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Modern Pork Production

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Over 10 percent of the nation’s pigs are produced in Northwest Iowa. Nationally, over 55,000 pig farms grow nearly 22 billion pounds of pork each year. That’s a lot of bacon, pork chops, ribs, etc. It takes more than 800,000 people to raise, process, transport, distribute, sell and cook all that pork. Pork producers take their job seriously - focusing on providing safe, wholesome food is their most important responsibility.

Packing and Processing

Part of these jobs are packing and processing, and exciting new growth is underway in this sector. In Sioux City, a plant is being built to help make room for large fall quarter pig production, and another plant is planned to be built next year in Wright County, Iowa. Other parts of the country are experiencing growth, as well. A plant in Windom, Minn. is being transformed from beef to pork; Pleasant Hope, Missouri, recently had a smaller plant go online; and a plant is being built in Coldwater, Michigan.

Swine Production

Production is gearing up to send more pigs to these new plants, and expansion is underway as new farrowing and finishing facilities are being constructed. Producers that are constructing new barns are welcome to contact an Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach Swine or Engineering Specialist for help siting a facility or complying with current regulations.

Ensuring pork food safety is a complex undertaking that requires awareness of the role that everyone plays in the food chain. On the farm, many factors can affect the safety of pork, which is why today’s farming operations employ a wide variety of technology and techniques to minimize food safety threats. Modern practices, such as raising pigs indoors and closely monitoring all aspects of biosecurity have vastly improved today’s pork in terms of safety and quality.

Swine farming today is a seven-day-a-week job. Key areas focused on include production, nutrition and health. Farmers use scientifically formulated nutrition for efficient growth, and increase health status through rigorous barn sanitation, proper vaccinations, strict biosecurity, and medications when needed and advised by a veterinarian. About 40 years ago, pig farmers started raising pigs inside to help protect the animals from weather extremes. Technology has improved efficiency through management practices of improved genetics, barns and air quality, and advances in biosecurity. These

types of changes have been beneficial to the industry. Data researched by the National Pork Board revealed that pig farmers use 78 percent less land, 41 percent less water and leave a 35 percent smaller carbon footprint than pig production from 50 year ago.

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