

SWINE PRODUCTION IS A SOUND ENTERPRISE

In 1967 North Dakota had 268,000 hogs on farms, and in the two years following this the number increased so that by 1970 there were 408,000 head on farms. By January 1, 1972 the number had decreased to 379,000 head with a further decrease to 368,000 by January 1, 1973. During 1973 there was an increase again so that by December our hog population had increased to 374,000 head, an increase above 1972 of approximately 5 percent. Hogs and pigs on farms December 1, 1974 were estimated at 322,000, 14 percent below a year earlier. By June 1, 1975 all hogs and pigs on farms in North Dakota numbered 350,000 head, down 18 percent from a year earlier, which was the lowest inventory on this date since June 1, 1964, when estimates began.

Our state could well stand a hog population several times greater than we have at the present time. The demand for meat should continue to be strong and while there will be more beef, poultry it appears, will be a weak competitor. In general statement the price range for live hogs should be from \$35 to \$50 per hundred weight through 1975 with a strong outlook into the future. At present the profit outlook for the future is more uncertain than normal and will depend upon numbers of actual hogs, prices and cost of feed. There is a good probability of at least average profits using the present price standards in the years ahead.

During recent years there is little evidence of a regular and systematic cyclical pattern in hog prices. About 1937 such a pattern began to develop. However, this cycle was distorted during the Korean conflict¹ and again since 1967. Over the years hog prices have been subject to extremes which have brought about producers getting started in hogs or increasing the size of the breeding herd when prices are on the up trend or at the peak but cutting production when prices dip to a low point. During the last 5 years the low point of hog prices did not sink much below \$15 which was above the low point experienced in previous years.

The typical hog cycle has averaged about four years¹ from peak to peak with high production usually about a year behind peak prices. The low point for prices has up to the present followed closely the high point in production. The

present cycle began in 1970 with both high prices and high production. Prices slipped in 1971 with the size of the pig crop falling a year later. In spite of good prices in 1972 hog numbers did not increase much in 1973 and the increase in number for 1974 did not change a great deal. Perhaps the reason for the limited increase in numbers is that pork production is a farmer-feeder operation and with the good price for feed and grain it is being sold on the cash market and hog numbers do not need to increase to market the feed grain probability. In addition, hog numbers are not increasing because many regard the present price as artificial and that it may not hold. If grain and supplement prices lessen and hog prices do not plummet numbers may increase in 1975.

Hog prices usually have been heaviest in late summer and lowest in late fall or early winter¹. This is due to heavier farrowings in the spring than in the fall. The increased number of producers specializing in hog production with year-round farrowing has increased the importance of farrowing during the summer and winter, the off seasons, which has done much to stabilize the market. In recent years pork has been processed more and more in less perishable forms and the storage of these pork products tend to level out wholesale prices which at one time reflected sharply the seasonal variations in slaughter. It is desirable no to jump into swine production when the demand is up and prices are high, remember - the market price is not apt to stay that way even with the present demand for pork.

Swine production should not be a short time enterprise. When a producer goes into the business or expands with hogs from \$30 to \$40 or even higher per hundred he should never feel that he can skim off the cream and get out before the price drops or that the prices will never go lower. His sights should be set on his contribution to the enterprise as a long time venture. This will see him through years of high prices and other years of low prices and will give him a stable income at a good average market price. Over the long period whether he starts at a high or low point, based on market prices, the high and low points will tend to level out and the operation will become a lucrative enterprise.

Feed costs at present vary from \$12 to \$22.50 to produce 100 pounds of pork depending on the type of ration and efficiency of the operation. Since it takes only from 5 to 5 $\frac{27}{31}$ months to produce a marketable hog weighing from 200 to 220 pounds the turnover is rather rapid and if the operation is efficient there will be an income of at least \$10 to \$15 more per hundred above feed costs.

Ideally it might be best to get in or increase swine number when hogs reach a market price which is a low of the most

recent market fluctuations. When hog prices are on the increase, if the increase in numbers doesn't quite meet the demand for pork, the price will continue upward and the price pattern may change. Parallel with this breeding stock on farms will begin to show a trend upward and will continue until the number marketed meets or passes the demand which results in a depressing effect on the market price. The slower the reduction in numbers on the farm the faster the market will drop.

Management of the swine herd, facilities at hand and finances are the most important factors that will determine whether or not the hog operation will be a profitable one. In management we have a need for an understanding of breeding, feeding practices, control of health problems and control of reproduction. The application of this knowledge to each specific operation, at the lowest possible cost per pig raised, will be the guiding factor which determines whether or not the enterprise will be profitable.

Pigs excel all other farm animals in the efficiency of converting their feed into edible meat. They also require less feed and less digestible nutrients for every pound of live weight than do other farm animals. The result of this high rate of feed conversion is a higher percentage of dressed carcass, with a larger proportion of the carcass edible than other farm animals.

Swine are very prolific and do not require expensive buildings unless the operator wishes to go into a confinement operation. In North Dakota there is a place for the small hog producer as well as the operator who produces large numbers under semi- or total confinement.

North Dakota, the most wholly agricultural state in our nation, has a tremendous production of grain which can be blended and balanced into rations and marketed to advantage through swine for the production of high grade edible meat. Hogs can also utilize feed that might not have another outlet such as dairy by-products, waste garden vegetables, garbage, and mixtures containing feed that need sorting or selection to make use of the edible portions. These waste or low level feeds can be converted into meat very efficiently by hogs. This points to the many advantages of hogs as meat producers of great importance in contributing to a balanced farming or ranching operation, in an excellent grain producing state.

We must always keep in mind that a feeder pig of medium weight has a faster rate of gain and better efficiency than

he will have as he gets fatter with increased age. For a pig to make real good gains coupled with good feed efficiency he should be carried along without a set back or being exposed to any circumstance that retards his growth during the first few weeks of his life. Should he go through such a period early in his life his true potential can never be fully realized anywhere along the line in the feeding period leading to a marketable animal. Swine to be efficient must be of modern meat type showing length, depth of body and balance, the short early maturing type requires more feed per 100 pounds of gain and yield a fatter carcass with more waste.

With the improvement of meat type animals in recent years and the greater demand for red meat with limited fat, starting with the right type of animal is essential. This requires study and consideration of the desirable features that should manifest themselves in the animals selected. Don't leave this up to someone else - each potential producer should learn this for himself before starting the enterprise. There is no substitute for being able to build a foundation herd of the right type animals with a background of the qualities desired extending over a period of years. It is not possible to buy into a good herd and maintain the standard unless the operator has a knowledge of swine type.

In building a herd emphasis must be given those traits that have economic value. Some traits of the greatest value, are feed efficiency, backfat thickness, loin eye area, litter size and rate of gain. The livestock man building a hog enterprise must be willing to devote enough time to the study of hog production to be able to start with animals that constitute an efficient herd of the modern type and be able to manage the herd with gradual improvement.

To be successful in swine production a farmer or rancher, perhaps more so than with any other class of livestock, must have an interest in hogs that goes beyond the financial return. One who isn't interested in or dislikes hogs will probably not take the necessary steps to learn the essentials upon which a sound swine program must stand if the enterprise is to live over a period of years. These facts are summarized to point out that a thriving swine enterprise is tied so very closely to management, facilities, and control of disease and breeding in order to develop and maintain a profitable swine herd. A well managed swine operation will insure a steady, profitable income.

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