

Opening Remarks

Dave Struthers

Dave Struthers is part owner of a family farm operation near Collins, Iowa. The operation includes a 900 sow farrow-to-finish operation, 800 crop acres, and a 50-head ewe flock. They use several different production facilities, including 12 hoop structures for finishing.

Dennis is retiring from his post as director of the Leopold Center and has assumed the role of president of the Iowa Environmental Council — it will be very good for the farmers to have someone in that position with an agricultural background who will base decisions on facts, and not just emotions.

As a pork producer (like many of you here today), we are facing many challenges at this time. We are going through an extended and historically low downward price cycle. We face competition from large integrator- and investor-owned corporate facilities. We face intense scrutiny from the public regarding food safety, animal welfare, and environmental policy. We have government agencies such as EPA wanting to take away subtherapeutic antibiotics and earthen-basin manure storage based on theories and perceived threats, not on facts and science. Hogs, once

known as the mortgage lifters, currently are the mortgage makers. Will it always be this way? Of course it won't.

Pork production, and all of agriculture, is undergoing many changes but change is good. Dennis mentioned that in his days on the farm there were many changes; we still are going through those changes and I think the change is for the better. The consumer wants a healthy and nutritious product. They are also concerned how that product is produced.

We're here at a conference entitled "Swine System Options." Most of the options you'll hear about today have pigs in fresh air, sunshine, and bedding; things that are contrary to forced ventilation, fluorescent light, and concrete. Are those things bad or wrong? No, they are not. But what you'll hear today is from producers who have facilities that include fresh air, sun-

shine, and bedding. They do this perhaps to fill a niche market — maybe a certain avenue of production — in a so-called “natural” way. Many producers went this way for economic reasons — low-cost facilities that still give quality gains through that unit. Some went for healthier surroundings, for their workers, themselves, and their hogs. Some went that way for social reasons — because of the hog industry changes we’ve gone through — by the time you dig a hole on a farm, people think you are going to put up another large, “stinking” hog building.

Hog prices will become profitable again — we’ll ask John Lawrence how soon that will happen, and we hope he’ll have a good, quick answer for us. But hogs will be more than just an expensive hobby, they will be a profit maker in the future.

Those of us who are speakers today want to hear your questions; we may not know the answers to all of them, but we’ll give you true and honest answers that come from our experiences. This conference was designed for pork producers — we were involved in the planning, and as you’ll see from the program, we are involved in the discussion. Most of the speakers on the program are pork producers. Almost every session includes a pork producer. We’ll be open for questions during all the sessions, and especially at the closing coffee from 3:30 to 4:00 p.m. You can only go to three concurrent sessions, so if you have questions from another session, we’ll be there at the closing coffee to answer those questions.