Using hoops structures for early weaning and farrowing (Session 3C)

**PRODUCER PANEL:** Tom Frantzen, New Hampton; Homer Showman, Shellsburg; Jim Van Der Pol, Kirkhoven, Minnesota

**MODERATOR:** Carl Neifert, ISU Extension livestock swine specialist, Central Area

**RECORER:** Josh Sobaski, ISU Extension swine specialist, Southeast Area

**Tom Frantzen** is a farrow-to-finish swine producer from northeast Iowa. He has three 30 x 72-ft. “Cover All” hoops. He first learned about hoop house farrowing two years ago on an ISU tour, and began farrowing in hoops in March and April, 1998. Most of his hogs had been pasture-farrowed, something he has done for 25 years, then finished inside the hoop facilities. During the colder months, December and January, he farrows in a controlled temperature facility.

For farrowing inside hoops, Frantzen built his own 80 x 80-inch Illinois-style huts at a cost of about $200 each (46 sq. ft. total). Each hut requires four sheets of treated plywood, at a cost of about $125, then he cuts his own dimensional wood. He has placed 24 huts in each hoop, although it is quite congested in a 30-ft. wide hoop, and he probably will not use that many huts inside a hoop again.

Other key points:
- Frantzen prefers “roll down” doors on the huts, but does not like to lock corners very tightly.
- He averages 7 to 8.5 weaned pigs per sow. The key to minimizing death loss is keeping piglets inside the hut when they are first born.
- He recommends a hot bedding pack for additional floor heat.
- Finished hogs are loaded out through a “Grandin” sorting chute designed by Temple Grandin, which allows him to load out about 40 hogs in 5 minutes. He has been really pleased with this load-out facility.
- In between farrowing, he cleans hoop houses with a tine bucket loader.

**Jim Van Der Pol** and his son Josh have a farrow-to-finish swine operation in western Minnesota where they raise a Duroc-Berkshire cross sold in specialty markets. They decided to use hoops to get the most return out of a low capital investment (hoops). Before they built the hoop facilities, they had decided to quit work in traditional hog confinement facilities.

They built their first Biotech hoop two years ago with the intent to farrow once and finish twice in this facility. They built a second hoop, a “Cover All” structure, about six months later.

Under their current system, they pasture farrow females in September in individual huts that are placed inside a hooped structure. When pigs are two weeks old, the huts are removed and pigs are allowed to move freely inside the hoop. They remain inside the hoop for winter feeding, and
when pigs are sold in March, the facility is
cleaned so that it can be used for farrow-
ing again.

They use Porta Huts for farrowing (manu-
factured in Storm Lake) that are 4.5 ft.
wide and 7.5 ft. long, and cost about $100
each. Huts are aligned in two rows of 11
huts that face each other down the center
of the hoop, where there is a 15 ft. open
space. They have had problems with bossy
sows in this alignment, and may switch
the configuration to solve it.

In 1996, they used only 21 Porta Huts in
each hoop. Recently they have been using
24 Porta Huts, which gets to be crowded,
so they might put four huts at the end of
each hoop structure to give them more
space.

They feel the economics of using hooped
facilities in this manner have been excel-

tent. Van Der Pol said it was “the best day
of my life” when he started pasture far-
rowing. Quality of life has become a big
part of his swine operation. He also said
he won’t produce pigs unless another
person is involved in the operation.

Other key points:
• They average 9 weaned pigs per litter.
• Females must be managed closely to get
good results. This includes using nose
rings, especially for pasture farrowing.
• The goal is to farrow all sows within 7
days of one another. They also want all
sows in huts when they farrow.

QUESTIONS:
When do you farrow in the hoop house?
The third week of March. He also tried to
farrow in November but did not have
good results.

When are you done farrowing?

Although it’s new for them, they try to
keep the farrowing within a seven-day
period.

Homer Showman has a wean-to-finish
operation, which includes eight hooped
structures and a nine-year-old grow-to-
finish confinement facility. He began using
hoops five years ago, when he built three
30 x 72 ft. hoops with a 16-ft. concrete pad
on the south end. In the past, he had done
pasture and confinement farrowing, but
does not farrow pigs at the current time.
His last three hooped structures were built
on a concrete pad 2 ft. above the dirt pad.

He began putting weaned pigs in hooped
structures several years ago when he ran
into a schedule problem. He found that he
lost only two pigs out of 400 head, so he
decided weaning pigs in hoops would
work, even in the summer.

He got first group of pigs in March when
the outside temperature was 15 degrees
below zero. After that experience, he went
to a “hover system” in which curtain
material is stretched 30 ft. across the
building, and bales are stacked 10 ft. high
in the back by the main door. For his next
group of weaned pigs, he used small corn
stalk bales stacked two bales high with
2 x 4 lumber placed across the width of the
door and covered with small corn stalk
bales.

He bought infrared heaters to warm an
area inside the building but he has never
used them. He also started to use hot
sawdust as a warm bedding pack but was
concerned about “bugs.” Now he uses
compost from his own bedding to create a
10 x 20-ft. warm area for baby pigs.

Other key points:
• He hand-feeds pigs on the floor when

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they first arrive, and troughs are used for water.
• Lids are tied up on waterers.
• Temperatures in the inside “hover” area in January are about 120° F.
• He never puts pigs in hoop buildings during extremely cold weather. In January and February, all new pigs go into confinement facilities.
• Feeder pigs required three sorts to sell an entire group, but his wean-to-finish system requires only two sorts. The first sort takes about 75 to 80 percent of the group. The next sort takes all but about three or four head.
• Feed efficiency in his wean-to-finish operation is 2.6 to 2.7, and rate of gain ranges from 1.3 to 1.6 lb./day depending on genetics and health.

QUESTIONS:
Do you feed the same rations to your confinement hogs and your hoop hogs?
Yes, two-stage pellets, then grind and mix.

Do you have any trouble getting babies off the concrete and into the hover area?
No, pigs are forced into the hover area using a hog panel that is attached to the edge of the hover area against the cement for feeding.

How long do you leave hover area?
About two to three weeks.

How high do you stack the bales?
Two bales high, or about three feet.

Is piling a problem for pigs?
No.