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Swine system options for Iowa: A catalyst for change

Abstract
A special conference for swine producers, held February 21, 1996, at Iowa State University.

Keywords
Hoops and alternative livestock systems

Disciplines
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Can the independent small- and medium-sized Iowa farm continue to be a viable part of the Iowa pork producing industry? Despite the emphasis being given to large-scale hog operations locating in Iowa, there are still ways for independent producers to raise swine and be profitable. The sponsors of this conference offered an education program filled with hope and plenty of concrete suggestions for farmers trying to compete in the changing swine industry. Many of the 230 attendees at this conference came away greatly encouraged about their future and the alternatives open to hog farmers. They heard and exchanged tips on everything from marketing to animal husbandry to low-cost swine housing units. Speakers offered information on alternative production systems uniquely suited to Iowa’s small- to medium-sized swine operations. Among the presenters were John Lawrence, ISU Extension economist; Stan Curtis, animal scientist from Pennsylvania State University; Bo Algers, director of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences; Mike Duffy, ISU Extension economist, and Mark Honeyman, ISU animal scientist. In the afternoon, conference participants took part in farmer-led discussions about outdoor production systems, hooped structures, deep-bedded systems, remodeling existing structures, and open-front systems.

Producers left the conference with optimism as well as many constructive ideas about improving their own operations. A survey administered at the conference indicated that many of the those attending planned to put the suggestions they’d heard to work on their farms. As one producer put it, "After today, I am not discouraged about raising hogs. This meeting showed me that options exist besides the large total confinement operations." Another commented, "I was thinking of quitting my operation, but now I believe I can compete."

In November, 1996, a follow-up survey was sent to swine producers who attended the conference. Among the 50 percent who responded, it was clear that the conference had been a catalyst for change in their operations. Fourteen percent said that they had remodeled existing structures after the conference while more than one-third had constructed new buildings, mainly hooped buildings for finishing. More than 20 percent had changed their marketing strategies since the conference. Sixty-five percent reported that the conference had played a role in changing swine management and production practices on their farms. For many of them, their primary sources of information on alternative hog production practices were sustainable agriculture organiza-
tions (such as the Leopold Center and Practical Farmers of Iowa), magazines, and ISU Extension. Once again, several respondents noted that the conference gave them the tools and support to believe that they could compete in today's hog marketplace. A December 1996 follow-up conference on alternative hog production systems sponsored by the Leopold Center and ISU Extension held at Amana, Iowa drew over 60 hog producers.

As of publication, only a few copies of the 136-page paperback conference proceedings book from the Swine System Options conference remain. But if you are interested in a specific topic covered at the conference, copies of articles about individual sessions will still be provided free of charge.

Articles available include:

**General Session Speakers:**
- Welcome and Overview, Lauren Christian, ISU
- Swine Marketing: Changes and Opportunities, John Lawrence, ISU
- Managing Alternative Production Systems, Stan Curtis, Penn State University
- Managing Alternative Production Systems: A Swedish Perspective, Bo Algers, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
- Overview of Swine Options: Economics and Production, Mike Duffy, ISU
- Farmer Discussion Sessions:
  - Outdoor Production Systems
  - Hooped Structures
  - Deep-bedded Systems
  - Remodeling Existing Structures
  - Open-Front Systems

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