



Pork Production Today

Swine Production Systems

Whether pigs are raised in pastures or in totally enclosed barns, systems approaches dominate pork production. Repeatable methods and specialization characterize the modern pork producer regardless of the type of facilities used.

The choice of facility type is mainly a balancing of capital investment, labor requirement and management expertise. Animal and worker welfare are primary concerns to producers, regardless of the type of facilities chosen. The key to good swine care rests more on the producer's ability to properly manage housing than it does on the specific type of housing provided.



Controlled-environment buildings require much higher investment but lower labor per unit of output. These facilities make handling hogs easier, provide for more direct observation of animals, allow greater control of the production process, protect both animals and workers from the heat, cold, rain and snow, and usually result in faster growth to market weight and better feed efficiency.

Most controlled-environment facilities are operated in “all-in, all-out” fashion where pigs are moved in groups, and buildings are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between groups. Controlled-environment facilities take little land and thus leave more available for grain production.

Pasture or outdoor production systems involve more acres of land and more labor per unit of output. They require generally lower capital investment, especially when marginal land can be used, but usually give lower productivity in terms of output per unit of land or labor or feed.

Interest in outdoor or pasture facilities has increased in recent years as “systems” ideas have been imported from Europe and as some niche markets have developed for meat from pasture-raised pigs. Well-run pasture systems can be cost competitive with controlled-environment operations.

Regardless of the type of facilities used, the objective is the same: To provide the proper environment to maximize the welfare and productivity of both animal and worker.

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