



HOG COUNTRY

Serving Western Canada's Hog Producers

A NEW INNOVATIVE FEED SYSTEM HELPS BIG SKY

A new computerized hog feeding system installed by Big Sky Pork is there to help the company get the most out of its feed dollars.

The new feed delivery equipment is from Feedlogic Systems, and offers an opportunity to more closely monitor feeding within a production unit, explained Cliff Ehr, production manager with Big Sky.

"The reason we looked at it is it allows individual pen data to be collected," he said.

In the past feed consumption, and the relating data of feed conversions and rate of gain have only been possible on a very broad basis of a barn, or rooms within a barn. That meant averaging data of a number of pens of different weights, and genetics. With the new system, data is collected on a pen-by-pen basis.

With such data, consumption can be monitored daily, said Ehr, adding feed delivery can be matched more closely to the expected optimum performance of a group of pig based on factors such as their weight.

"The whole feeding philosophy is driven by intake, how much the pig can eat," he said.

However, optimizing intake without wasting feed is the key to ensuring better profit margins since feed remains the major cost in hog production, with it ranging from 50 to 60 per cent of the cost to market a hog.

Big Sky's robotic systems dispense feed

automatically and the weight and time of each delivery is recorded and transmitted live via a wireless network to an off-board computer.

Feedlogic Systems president Drew Ryder said in a prepared release,

Feedlogic's technology can provide large producers such as Big Sky Farms with a competitive edge.

"With increasing pressure on operating costs and a continuing difficult market for hogs, the more producers can do to lower costs without sacrificing the quality of their product, the better," he said.

"With increasing pressure on operating costs and a continuing difficult market for hogs, the more producers can do to lower costs without sacrificing the quality of their product, the better,"

—Cliff Ehr

"Focused nutrition management will be needed to stay profitable and survive current and future downturns in the industry. The biggest savings will be realized by producers that have the software and hardware tools to understand the current performance in their barns and make rapid changes to feeding strategies."

How effective the new system is in controlling feed costs is yet to be determined, with the two units at Big Sky installed for less than a year.

"I guess it's a little early in the development of product to know yet," said Ehr.

However, there's no doubting the soundness of the theory, he said, noting it's logical to believe feeding pigs of different weights, say 40 and 70 kilograms, will improve their efficiency.

"But, it's something we can't really tie a dollar value to," he said. "It's too preliminary, but we know there is a cost."

The other factor is balancing whatever savings are realized with the new system, with the costs of installing it, which Ehr said is higher at this point.

Data collected in ensuing months, and what that data allows in regards to optimizing feed will eventually determine how cost-effective the technology will be. At this point though, Ehr said the system "has done what we anticipated it could do." •

— By Calvin Daniels

Story featured from February /March 2004 edition of Prairie Hog Country on page 34

PRAIRIE HOG COUNTRY

Ph (780) 986-0962 Fax (780) 980-9640

email: hogcountry@shaw.ca

Courier Address: 4205-41 St. Leduc AB T9E 4V5 Mailing Address: Box 5536 Leduc AB T9E 2A1