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SOME PROBLEMS IN PORK PRODUCTION

The General Situation

The factors governing the "supply and demand" situation in pork production are rather well understood at the present time. Predictions of probable supply and demand from six months to a year in advance may be made with reasonable accuracy.

The data furnished by the U.S. Department of Agriculture show an increase of 3.5 per cent in the number of sows farrowed in the spring of 1926. Breeders were moved to do this by the favorable prices for fat hogs prevailing in 1925. However, the adverse spring weather conditions reduced the farrowing by 4.2 per cent. The 1926 spring pig crop is actually smaller than that of 1925. This should decrease the available supply of pork. Breeders have kept back sows for next spring's farrowing. The result is to remove from slaughter the heavy hogs usually going onto the market during the summer. The available supply of pork is thereby decreased. Hogs may be fed to heavier weights, however, because corn is cheap relative to pork. This will add to supply.

Advance records report hog breeders as "intending" to farrow 40 per cent more sows in the fall of 1926 than a year ago. All breeders do not live up to these reported intentions. However, a large increase may be expected. If corn stays low in price the pigs probably will be fed to heavier weights. This will further increase the supply of pork. Fall pigs will likely be fed liberally on cheap corn and tend to mature earlier than usual. The pork supply available after July 1, 1927 should increase rapidly.

A continued favorable domestic demand coupled with a satisfactory export trade has favored pork prices. The price of hogs has kept up due to a good demand coupled with a real shortage in the supply. The estimates furnished by the U.S. Department of Agriculture suggest an appreciably smaller slaughter in 1926 than last year. Storage stocks on July 1, 1926 were the smallest for that date in eleven years and 18.5 per cent less than last year. Altho storage stocks are lower than usual the buyers of pork and pork products are not likely to buy heavily to replenish these stocks while prices are high. Buyers of hogs see ahead of them a large and increasing supply. Fresh pork will be substituted for the storage stocks. Pork will go into storage at the lower price levels likely to follow the arrival upon the market of the increase in hog numbers and weights.

Because of increased production prices during the winter of 1926-27 are likely to fall off gradually. If breeders follow their usual practice of overbreeding when pork is high and breed heavily this winter for farrowing in the spring of 1927 a very material increase in pork supplies may be expected to follow in 1927-28 and prices may fall still further. Continued active demand may not consume this large amount of pork except at reduced prices. Should employment conditions become unfavorable, thus cutting down consumption, or should the export demand fall off even in part, the price must of necessity be reduced.

Breeders of hogs and producers of pork will do well to note the trend of the "supply and demand" for their product. Individuals who adjust their production to the prospective situation may avoid losses that usually come from "following the crowd."

Swine Management for 1927

The swine breeder who farrows pigs in the spring of 1927 and markets fat hogs from eight to ten months later may look for competition. When larger quantities of pork are produced than the market can readily consume the price falls. Some men under such circumstances may produce hogs at a loss. An individual's chances for loss may be minimized by proper management.

Early Marketing. Pigs can be put onto the early market by early farrowing and by skillful feeding. The heavy run of hogs in the fall usually comes in November, December and January. At that time the yearly price is generally at its lowest. The light run usually comes in September. Prices at that time are higher. March pigs can be put on the market in September. The price in September has been from \$1.00 to \$2.00 per cwt. higher than 45 days later. A 200 pound pig at \$11.50 sells for \$23.00. Forty-five days later he may weigh 250 pounds. If the market is down to \$10.00 he brings only \$25.00. The increase of fifty pounds will cost from eight to ten cents per pound. It may cost more. For the increase of 50 pounds in weight one may incur a cost of \$4.00 to \$5.00. The return for the increase in weight may be but \$2.00. Ordinarily it is better to sell the lighter weights at the higher price. When feed is very cheap or when selling prices are likely to maintain a level or to rise, the situation is obviously different.

Economical Production. Breed sows to a good boar from prolific stock. Care well for the sows during pregnancy. Feed a balanced ration. Furnish plenty of water at drinkable temperature. Protein and water must be supplied for sows to grow pigs. Provide exercise. Keep sows tame. Wild mothers kill pigs. Farrow large litters of robust, healthy pigs in clean, sanitary quarters. Be watchful while pigs are young. Avoid contamination with disease or parasites. Move sows and pigs onto clean pastures if not farrowed there. Legume pastures are better than other varieties. Feed liberally with farm feeds. Avoid overfeeding. Add protein to supplement non-legume pastures such as bluegrass or rye. Skimmilk is of high value as a protein supplement. Provide plenty of clean water. Encourage young pigs to eat. Provide a creep which will give the pigs a chance to get their share of feed. Provide shade in hot weather. Oil, spray and disinfect to keep down lice and other parasites. Farrow large litters, save the pigs and reduce cost thus producing pork at a low cost per pound.

Fences, gates, panels, shade, water and buildings may actually save feed. Pastures aid digestion, assist elimination and make for healthier pigs. A healthy, robust animal free from disease, parasites and worry can "make his feed go further." A given amount of feed will produce more pork in the same amount of time or even in less time. Such economies are in addition to the skill of the feeder who by watchful care, adjusting, changing, balancing his rations pushes his feeding animals to quick maturity. Such economies are in the field of swine management and are the result of careful advance organization of the enterprise.

Sell in competition with other producers. Gain by having a cost for production lower than the market price for which pork is sold.

Obviously only a few men will follow the plans outlined. If everyone produced early or if every breeder produced economically these suggestions could not apply. But all men do not act together. Some can not. Some prefer not to follow the suggestions. A few individuals may do so. These men will benefit by so doing.

Meeting the Situation

A study of the various factors which make up the cost of producing pork shows the single item of feed to constitute from 80 to 90 per cent of the total. It is evident that effort put forth in making a saving in this one factor may give greater results than in all other factors combined. A ten per cent saving in the feed cost will represent a gain of eight to nine per cent in the total. A saving of fifty per cent of all the other costs as labor, shelter, interest, veterinary and miscellaneous items will hardly equal the smaller relative saving in this one factor. This does not mean we should starve our pigs. On the contrary pigs should eat more but they must be fed intelligently. An example will make this clear.

The farmer "A" shown below (records from four years of statistical study on Minnesota farms kept by this office) produced pork in competition with the average of his neighbors and consistently used less feed per unit. When in 1921 his neighbors required 463 pounds of grain and 300 pounds of skimmilk to produce 100 pounds of pork, he used but 364 pounds of grain (corn, oats, and barley) and 261 pounds of skimmilk. Likewise in each year following he saved on the total feed required to produce 100 pounds of pork. This saving in feed made possible the growing of large quantities of pork with the feeds available on the farm.

	Feed Used per 100 Pounds of Pork Produced							
	1921		1922		1923		1924	
	"A"	Avg.	"A"	Avg.	"A"	Avg.	"A"	Avg.
Total lbs. produced	22,800	10,000	36,000	13,700	22,200	16,800	23,800	10,300
Feed) Grain per)	364	463	341	543	499	513	415	432
cwt.) Skimmilk	261	300	177	358	400	398	329	540
Cost per 100#	3.85	5.64	4.01	7.08	7.88	8.81	8.60	9.63

At first glance then we may assume a farmer must be a skillful feeder in order to make a saving in swine raising. Farmer "A" above was a skillful feeder but a further study of the farm organization shows some facts not revealed in an inspection of the feeding table alone. Saving feeds in swine raising may be achieved by better utilization of feeds. If the pigs consuming the feeds are better able to use these feeds additional savings may be made.

The farmer considered above was successful in farrowing and growing healthy, robust pigs. These pigs were free of disease, worms and parasites. They were farrowed in a clean, comfortable hog house. A goodly number of pigs was saved per litter. Ample water was provided the sows and growing pigs. Two pastures were available, one of them being rape pasture. Pastures were not overcrowded. A convenient cement feeding floor made feeding easier and saved feed. Good equipment made possible the easier handling of sows and pigs.

A further study of farmer "A" shows that his dollar costs were lower than his neighbors. His plan of using farm grown feeds as corn, oats, barley, skimmilk and pastures lowered the money outlay for his pigs. The elimination of commercial cash purchased feeds gave greater employment to his land, his labor, his equipment and his managerial ability. He worked for himself and earned a satisfactory way by so doing. His dollar costs in comparison with the average of his neighbors are shown above.

W. J. Roth.