

DRIVERS OF SWINE

production efficiency



By Fred Bechaz (Pr.Sci.Nat; Feedtek)

Within a swine production system, there are many different parameters that can be measured. Many of these parameters are production orientated, but the question can rightly be asked if they do in fact add value to the bottom line on the financial statement.

Overall farm profitability

At the end of the day, it is the specific parameters that improve the overall profitability of the farm, that need to be monitored and improved. When times are tough and costs are ever escalating and prices realised for the final product are sub-optimal, efficiency should be the first word that comes to mind.

Genetic improvements

Giant genetic steps have been made with regard to sow fertility and piglets born alive per sow per

year, especially over the last number of years. The new generation sows are highly prolific and thus their nutritional requirements also need to be optimised. We can't feed sows the way we fed them 10 years ago. We need to improve efficiency of nutrient utilisation in such a way as to produce maximum milk and limit body condition loss as much as possible during lactation. Voluntarily feed intake is a limiting reality during lactation and thus efficiency is the key word.

Options to improve efficiency

Aim to improve number of piglets born alive, piglets weaned and pigs sold per sow per year. This will in turn decrease the relative sow costs per kg of meat sold per year.

By increasing the final carcass weight, efficiency is improved and fixed costs decreased per kg of meat sold. This is only true if the extra kg sold are produced at an optimally efficient cost. The older

the pigs grow, the more feed they do consume and the poorer their feed conversion becomes. It is important to find the correct balance between age, weight at slaughter and feed costs.

Feed costs are between 75% and 85% of total costs on a swine production unit. The biggest driver of costs should be the efficiency of converting feed into meat.

When feed costs are escalating, as is currently the case, the first thought that usually comes to mind is how to reduce feed costs; "We need to make the feed cheaper, to save costs." Unfortunately, in order to reduce feed costs, the tendency is to decrease the nutrient density of the diet, this then leads to an increase in feed conversion ratio (FCR). More feed is thus needed to produce a kg of meat. This usually also has the effect that the pigs need to stay longer on the farm for the same weight at slaughter. The result is extra days to slaughter and higher total feed cost.

Ensure that raw materials of the best quality is purchased at the best possible price. Raw materials that seem to be cheap, may actually be of poorer nutrient quality (e.g. indigestible protein, mycotoxins etc.) and decrease feed efficiency instead of saving costs.



At least 40% of the feed consumed by a grower pig per day is used for maintenance, thus each day longer on the farm "costs" 40% of feed intake. If a pig eats 2,5 kg per day, then 1,0 kg is used for maintenance. At a cost of R5 000 per ton of feed, this equates to a maintenance cost of R5,00 per day for each day the pig stays longer on the farm.

Thus, in difficult times with high feed costs, we need to improve efficiency and get the most kg of meat off the farm as quickly as possible.

Re-evaluation of the ingredients used, as well as the different feed additives included in the feed. Ensure that whatever is included, is improving efficiency and not just costing extra money. Removing all feed additives and thereby decreasing the final cost of the feed, is not going to save money, but it is more than likely going to increase potential losses.

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Feed costs is therefore one factor, but improved margin over feed cost is actually what is going to affect the financial statements positively. Therefore always consult a professional animal nutritionist before making random changes to diets in an effort to try and save costs.

The practices applied in good times to make money, need to be maintained in difficult times to limit financial losses during these periods.

It is important to follow a holistic approach on-farm, with a very good communication system between farm manager, veterinarian, nutritionist and genetic supplier. When the above parties work well together as a team, the on-farm efficiency can be improved. Visit www.agrifarmacysa.co.za.

co.za for more information, contact the author on 082 821 5991 or send an email to fred@feedtek.co.za. For more information on home-mixing of high quality pig feeds, visit www.feedtek.co.za.



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