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Managing pig flow, pig spaces, facility utilization, and new construction to maximize profitability in a large system

Eric Christianson, DVM
Christensen Farms

Christensen Farms is a 165,000 sow Midwest USA pork production system utilizing a mix of conventional three site production and wean-finish to market over 3 million market hogs per year.

Building your system's space model

Different systems place different values on different attribute of production systems. Examples include single stock versus double stock wean to finish, conventional nurseries vs. wean-finish systems. There are different ways to skin a cat. Whichever methods result in the lowest cost of production for your system is the right choice. A common reason why one system is better for a particular company might be related to their ability to execute and capture results with the people and processes they have in place.

Nurseries vs. wean-finish

Many companies have abandoned conventional nurseries because the economics of a \$34 contract nursery versus a \$40 wean-finish contract made the nursery non-competitive. If we have nurseries that can operate on a \$20-22 contract rate, all of a sudden the conventional nursery system doesn't look so bad.

Double stock wean-finish vs. single stock

The age old argument here is whether the reduced performance (ADG, death loss) and extra freight associated with double stocking can be displaced by the facility cost savings of double stocking. In my experience this is entirely dependent upon the abilities of staff and producers to execute the strategies of caring for double stocked pigs and capturing the efficiencies of facility utilization through flow management.

Planning on Paylean use or not

Do I calculate my space needs based on use or lack of use of Paylean in market hogs. We have chosen to build our spaces based on needs of pigs not receiving Paylean and then use it as needed for seasonal variation and according to market attributes. In a short space situation, Paylean is

good return on investment but in a long space situation it is a push.

Long space or short space mentality

If you build your system to be long space during the summer time, you will have a lot of extra space the rest of the year so you must have a strategy to utilize this space such as purchasing weaners/feeders, supplying pig spaces & services to other systems, or slowing your pigs down in non summer months. Christensen Farms has chosen a long space strategy and actively purchases weaners and feeders from multiple sources as well as manages and feeds pigs for other entities to utilize this extra space. The obvious advantage of long space is to get pigs to the right market weights.

Other advantages of long space strategy

If you are long space you avoid the trap of building or contracting barns in a panic mode. We will only build barns within 50 miles of our feed sources. Every extra \$1 we pay per ton in feed freight to a finisher space results in costs per space per year of .75/space. So if I build 100 miles away and have feed freight of \$15 versus 10 miles away with freight of \$5 then those spaces are going to cost me \$7.50/space per year more to service. It is insane to build barns more than 50 miles from your feed source. Building

If you build or contract in a panic mode, you will build barns with the wrong people or in the wrong spots environmentally or wrong spots public relations wise. Don't build barns with bad actors or next to the county park.

If you use long space strategy you can keep your development team prospecting for sites continually rather than start and stopping them. The sales process takes 6 months so if you tell a development team to get sites today you won't have significant results until 6 months later. It is much more manageable to keep them always prospecting and then pick the cream of the crop for actual development.

