

Iowa Hoop Structures Used for Swine: A Survey

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Summary and Implications

By surveying 13 area extension livestock specialists in Iowa, it was estimated that there are 2,100 hoop structures used for swine production in Iowa. Approximately 90% of the hoops are used for feeding market pigs and the remaining 10% are used for housing gestating sows. It was estimated there were 768 producers in Iowa with hoops for swine. Approximately 50% of the producers are estimated to use composting of manure and approximately 40% composted swine mortalities. Also, approximately 40% of the producers with hoops were involved with contract feeding of pigs in hoops. This number of hoops would be capable of producing 1 million market pigs annually. The rapid adoption of hoops by Iowa farmers is attributed to the low costs and versatility of hoop structures. Many niche markets are emerging for which hoop-reared pigs would qualify.

Introduction

Beginning in 1995 or 1996, hoop structures became available to Iowa producers as an alternative housing system for swine. Iowa State University has been active in research and demonstrations of hoops for swine. Frequently, questions are asked about the acceptance of hoops for swine and how many swine hoops are in Iowa.

The objective of this study was to determine an estimate of the number of hoops used for swine production in Iowa and how many producers have swine hoops. Additional information was sought about the use of composting and contracting by swine producers with hoops. The surveyed group was the ISU area extension livestock specialists with swine responsibility.

Methods

In May 2001, 13 ISU area extension livestock specialists with swine responsibilities were surveyed regarding hoop structures used for swine in Iowa. Groups of counties were allocated to each area extension specialist, so that all counties were assigned once, but no counties were assigned more than once. The counties were assigned based on the area that the extension specialist served and thus was most familiar with. Not all county groupings were of similar size, but were generally based on the areas that the area extension specialist served. The number of counties per specialist ranged from 4 to 15 counties.

A one-page survey was distributed to the specialists. For the surveys that were not returned, the specialist was telephoned and the response taken over the phone. The response rate was 100%, i.e., all 13 surveys were completed, accounting for all counties in Iowa.

Results

The extension specialists estimated a total of 2,107 hoops with pigs in Iowa as of May 2001. Ninety percent of the hoops were used for feeding grow-finish pigs and the other 10% were primarily used for housing gestating sows.

The largest number of hoops for swine in Iowa was located in the traditional swine growing areas of northwestern, west central, northeastern, and southeastern Iowa.

There were an estimated 768 producers with hoops for pigs. Approximately 49% of the producers with hoops composted some or all of the hoop manure and 38% composted some of their pig mortalities. Forty percent of the hoop producers were estimated to feed pigs on contract. About 15% of the producers contract fed pigs for other farmers. Sixteen percent of the producers contract fed pigs for feed elevators and dealers. Nine percent of the producers contract fed pigs for contractors or packers.

Assuming 200 head of market pigs per hoop and 2.5 turns per year, the 2,000 hoops could produce 1 million market pigs annually, or approximately 4% of Iowa's annual market pig production. Considering the fact that hoops were not widely built in Iowa until 1996, and that the number of swine producers is declining rapidly, the results of this survey indicate rapid adoption of hoop technology for swine. Farmers may be building hoops for swine because of their low cost or versatility. The hoops also allow the farmers to access emerging niche markets.

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