



Some Audits are a Good Thing...Really!

By Geoff Geddes, for Swine Innovation Porc

A tax audit may be even less welcome than PEDv, but some audits are better than others. For pork producers, the good kind is an audit of on-farm best management practices conducted in 2017 at 24 farms across Canada. The audits were one of five pillars in the project “From Innovation to Adoption: On-farm Demonstration of Swine Research” carried out by the CDPQ (*Centre de développement du porc du Québec*) and Prairie Swine Centre, and funded by Swine Innovation Porc.

By focusing on best management practices, these audits shared some important findings on where the industry stands today and how it can improve in several key areas.

On-Farm Biosecurity

Calling biosecurity “important” is like describing winter on the prairies as “a bit chilly”. As new disease threats continue to emerge, this aspect of operations has received more attention in recent

years, as evidenced by the measures employed on audited farms.

For example, most farms restricted animal sourcing to one supplier to lessen the risk of a biosecurity breach, and the vast majority employed biosecurity measures like showering in and out and changing clothes and boots prior to barn entry. Since disease defences are only effective when they’re used properly, all farms insisted on detailed biosecurity training for staff.

Though biosecurity was clearly a priority at participating farms, there is always room for improvement. Almost half the farms were not keeping visitor registries up to date, and a third lacked proper signage for biosecurity. Both measures are simple, fast and inexpensive to employ, and with multiple disease threats around the globe, the sooner the better.

Personal Protection and Training

First the good news: Audit results indicate that safety is a top priority for pork producers across the country. Safety measures include dust masks, hearing protection and hydrogen sulphide (H₂S) monitors, or some combination of these.

Now the “less good” news: Approximately 60% of audited farms provide H₂S training for workers, something that is essential to ensure the proper response when an H₂S incident occurs. This survey was also a good reminder to use H₂S monitors for other situations besides pit pulling, such as power washing.

Training was less of an issue in the critical area of pig handling, as most farms provided such instruction via in-house sessions and videos.



Evaluating best management practices in Canadian pig farms can help the industry determine which areas are doing well and where improvements may be needed. Photo courtesy of Doug Richards



*The prevalence of using enrichment objects in group sow housing systems was included in the audit.
Photo courtesy of Doug Richards*

Washing Procedures

Saving water on farm has the two-pronged benefit of lowering costs for animal drinking and cleaning while reducing total manure production. By questioning conventional practices, it may be possible to reduce water use.

A prime example is the common practice of pre-soaking rooms before washing, a procedure carried out in 80% of audited farms that greatly increases water consumption. According to research, this is not always necessary, such as when washing fully slatted flooring. At the same time, producers should be mindful that pre-soaking partially slatted (concrete) floors is the most time efficient.

Nozzle selection is another opportunity to conserve water during the washing process. Just over half of farms in the survey currently use conventional nozzles, which reduce water consumption and washing time for both partially and fully slatted concrete floors.

Gestation Housing Systems

According to the latest version of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs, conversion to group sow (gestation) housing systems will be required by 2024, or stall housed sows will require

some type of exercise yet to be determined. A total of 21 of the 24 farms had sows on site, of which nine used a group housing system and the rest employed traditional stalls.

Of those nine, six installed a non-competitive system like electronic sow feeders or a free-access system, primarily for the opportunity to collect data that would aid in herd management. The remaining three farms opted for a direct competitive feeding system to save on conversion costs.

Once the decision on the housing system has been made, the next step is ensuring proper timing of group formation to optimize productivity of the sow herd. For this audit, all nine farms employing sow housing made the right timing choice, forming groups either before day 7 or after day 28 post insemination.

Keeping those groups happy and productive is the role of enrichment. When applied properly, which means using items that are simple, safe, soft, sanitary, suspended and well-positioned, enrichment can go a long way to minimizing aggression in the herd. It was thus encouraging to see that eight of the nine farms audited for enrichment were on board with this practice, with chains or wood being the most common choices.

Based on the experiences of the 24 audited farms, there's a lot to think about in assessing your operation. Reviewing these areas takes time, thought and commitment, but compared to a tax audit, it's a piece of cake. ☺

For more information....

If you would like to learn more about the work described in this article you may contact:

- Geneviève Berthiaume at gberthiaume@cdpq.ca
- Ken Engle at kme131@mail.usask.ca