

Activities and Concerns Report

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There may have been reported trouble in Meredith Willson's River City report, but it was pale in comparison to the challenges facing the pork industry today. Our challenges are within, outside and adjacent to the pork industry. They appear to have no common factor for solving.

Within our industry it appears that we are unaware of the degree of change that can be molded into the animals we produce in such a short period of time. At the beginning of certification and carcass evaluation to improve the carcass value of our hogs, we had almost six times as many people in the pork business as we have today. Therefore, unity of act and thought was much more difficult, trends were slow to develop and achievement was tedious and slow to reach measurable degree.

Today with a little over 500,000 pork producers of all sizes and kinds in this country producing as many or more hogs in total than we were 20 years ago, we, therefore, have many more animals per producer. Therefore, any change in type or kind in any one herd has more impact on the total industry than it used to.

During our slow but determined effort to reduce fat production and increase lean meat per market animal, there have been some detrimental factors of efficient reproduction and growth rate that slipped into our hog population with very little attention due to the very gradual exposure that was evident. A very few years ago our awareness to these loss factors

hit like a bomb and immediate trends developed to blunt continued muscle development.

I doubt that those that have led the reversal from flared loins, bulging hams and prominent shoulders to flat muscle, tapered shoulders, taller animals are aware of the speed with which their efforts have impacted upon the total industry. Due to the size of their seed-stock operations today compared to a few short years ago, their efforts have touched many more herds more quickly than even they realized that they would. Two years ago, some packers began to report noticeable changes in the carcass values of the animals processed in their plants. Today we are seeing the results in the retail markets. An eastern judge in a pork cookout contest did not want to consider thick, large loin-eyed pork chops in the contest because she said this type of product was not available any more in stores in her area. At a recent NPPC function we ordered a few hundred dinners with three-fourths to one-pound pork chops. At the dinner we had to send some of them back to the kitchen because they were three-inches thick because the loin eye was less than three-square inches.

The day of take-it-or-leave-it is over. Consumers are expecting a satisfactory product for the price they are paying, or they will leave it and choose a competitive product. We are not too far down the road to adjust our efforts so that pork quality and pork efficiency are in balance. They must be in balance if production is to gradually grow and if consumer acceptance continues to grow in like dimension. We have the knowledge, the tools, the animals and the people to bring this balance about.

Outside of our industry we can sum up our challenges with the word government. Off-the-cuff statements, actions and planning by government

leaders and regulatory officials keeps the future of our pork industry in a constant turmoil. In the past twelve months we have been witness to one of the most emotional unrests ever to hit the pork industry of this nation. PRV, pseudorabies, or whatever you want to call it, rose to a boil; and in midsummer, USDA officials came out with a tentative program, then a corrected program. The industry leaders reviewed it and left a meeting in August feeling that a practical program would be introduced into the Federal Register for implementation. That entry has not been made as of this date. States are continuing to grope for in-state programs that will cover their in-house problems until the true dimensions of the federal program are apparent. The introduction of vaccines has taken off some of the pressure, but it has not erased the problem.

The permissiveness of the USDA labeling division that defies the dictionary meaning of certain words has permitted other competitive products to adopt the widely known and accepted terminology of pork products in order to obtain display-counter space and a degree of consumer attention until they make product comparisons.

The nitrite-nitrate bomb has been fused and a lady in Washington holds a lighted match ready to activate it upon her impulse without regard for economic impact or factual human health protection. This and other problems today stem from a law being passed in earlier congressional sessions without true dimension of intent nor its limitation of application in the future. Science and technology continue to advance daily and have no limitation on how they may be applied to earlier developed and formed laws that seemed good at the time.

Feed additive and health treatment products for efficient production of healthy hogs to produce wholesome pork have been front-page for several years now. Here again condemning and convicting are being pursued and enacted without due process or opportunity for the individual to defend. A test is being used to convict producers that is admittedly 10 to 30 percent variable in its accuracy. These figures are quotes from actual government and independent research people in this particular sulfa residue area.

When cornered, those in government say it's "the law." It is really too bad when laws are enacted to protect and end-up being convicting tools due to the unexplained dimension of an earlier law is not truly defined.

As a result, we have today unrest in adjacent segments of our pork industry who claim that they are being unduly treated because all market hogs are not identified to farm of origin. Identification of hogs has been used for years to identify for genetic bloodline, registration, disease control and between farm and market movement. The NPPC has endorsed and encouraged the USDA to implement a mandatory sow and boar identification and disease monitoring program to stamp out the minimal disease levels of the industry.

Today there are good, honest pork producers who have seen their neighbors unjustly accused of violating feed additive use and in seeking to avoid undue economic loss in their own production systems, have chosen to use different marketing systems and procedures. We believe they have that right to make that choice. We do not believe that identification of market animals should be a deterrent to a producer being able to choose any market system he so chooses. His rights are becoming fewer every day

it seems, but we believe this is still one worth fighting for. Any marketing system or buyer has the right to identify all animals in his buy if he so chooses. No one should seek to defy that fact, but it is also important that the producer has his rights as well.

That's enough for problems, challenges and debates. In case you haven't noticed, pork and hog prices have been holding levels above those forecasted by many. Even with production increases in 1977 up 13 percent for the first 10 months of this year, we have 16 percent less pork in cold storage at the same point compared to one year ago. NPPC promotion programs have expanded to include more major city areas in around-the-calendar advertising and promotion. The scope of our efforts grows each year. We have excellent cooperation with the major packing companies and retail chains as well as independents across the nation. This entire program is made possible by pork producers, their investments and their personal leadership in guiding their organization. They are proud of their product, their organization and industry. I'm proud to be working for them. Thank you.