

WHOLE HERD TESTING

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Our Duroc herd was established in 1895 and we are striving to maintain our reputation of providing quality breeding animals. To accomplish this, we know that extensive performance and production records are essential.

We are now producing about 1,400 litters annually and from them plan to keep complete records on over 11,000 pigs to help select and evaluate approximately 2,500 boars and 5,000 gilts that we will offer for sale this year. More important, these records along with visual appraisal are used to identify our replacement animals for herd improvement.

One common objective the entire swine industry shares is that of efficiently producing quality, saleable meat. Within this broad spectrum we find many levels of production from the seed stock to the commercial producer. Each must establish his goals and his market to determine the necessary records needed to attain his objective.

Should classifications be necessary, we would come under the category of seed stock multiplier. Our order of selection trait priorities are as follows:

Soundness

Freedom of Serious Defects

Reproductive Ability

Growth

Leanness

Efficiency

In general terms, it seems that seed stock producers will often sacrifice soundness and reproduction to more rapidly attained desired conformation. Most of the serious commercial producers will not sacrifice soundness or reproduction but might sacrifice conformation to attain growth rate and in some cases, leanness.

As we consider all of the traits important in our selection process we establish minimums for each. In considering many traits we grant that our progress in any one area is not rapid. We do feel that our genetic progress is positive and is appreciated by our customers.

I want to point out in passing that although we gather and use an extensive amount of analytical data we strongly believe that visual appraisal and subjective evaluations must play a significant part in our selection process.

RECORDS

(listed chronologically)

To maintain an accurate sow inventory, we add to the inventory the gilts bred weekly and deduct the sows culled. This is done for each breed.

To monitor the breeding success and farrowing schedule, we get a weekly total for gilts and sows and (by breed) the number bred, returned and settled.

Farrowing record of pigs born, number and visual appraisal of size, quality and vigor. Sow record of farrowing ease, milking ability, notes on temperament, etc.

14 day litter weight at time of 14 day move to nursery.

Visual evaluation of litter at weaning to facilitate culling or mating selection for sows and to castrate boar pigs that show little promise.

On our new unit, each pig is weighed into litter test pens at 10 weeks of age. All but the very small pigs are left with the litter. Litter testing gives meaningful feed-efficiency information, allows boars and gilts to co-mingle and simplifies records and visual appraisal.

Feed conversion on recent period using ground ration.

252 Duroc Litters

Average of litters ranged from 2.73 to 3.03 # Feed/Gain

Variance between litters .295

110 Landrace and Whitecross litters

Average of litters ranged from 2.843 to 3.39

Variance between litters .546

Feed usage is determined by having enlarged identical feed drop boxes above each feeder with manual slide gates on the bottom. These boxes are filled with a Cable Vey system. As the self feeders in the pen run low, we open the feed box slide gate and drop the contents (approximately 63 lb) into the feeder.

To date, we have efficiency data on over 600 litters and are beginning to identify some variance between blood lines and breeds. Feed consumption information has been valuable in monitoring feeds and management.

Daily gain, days to 220#, back fat probe, and feed conversion data are calculated at the time the Nebraska SPF Association weighs each group. The SPF Association summary also tabulates index and ranks probe, gain and index ratios for each pig and also the sire lines.

One of our primary objectives is to produce breeding stock capable of uniform, consistent reproduction of quality saleable hogs. To this end we monitor the number of saleable hogs per litter. We also give each pig a composit score at the time they come off test that would coincide somewhat with their dollar value. We are evaluating sows partially on this total value score of their litters produced.

We are also attempting to individually average this pig value score for progeny evaluation of herd sires.

It is our opinion that every pig produced on the farm must be tested and accounted for in order that herd records would be meaningful and significant. We have disciplined our thinking and programmed our operation to this total and continuous program. It is obvious that a mandatory program such as the Nebraska SPF testing program provides incentive to many who would otherwise become lax.

The real value in these records is in their use in selection of replacement boars and gilts. They are also used to eliminate any animals not suitable for sale. Finally they are used to place dollar values on boars and gilts offered for sale.

Our customers are given individual records on nipple number, pigs farrowed and raised in the litter, days to 220#, back fat probe, and sire and dam. On occasions, they also show an interest in the price.