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36 Meet the America’s Pig Farmer of the Year™ finalists
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Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon...

It was fitting that a Bacon Brothers concert, showcasing actor Kevin Bacon and his brother, Michael, capped off this summer’s grand opening celebration of Fair Oaks Farm’s Pork Education Center in Indiana... and not just because of the duo’s last name. The ag community can take a cue from the well-known “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” game, which measures how closely the actor is linked to another celebrity.

What if there were a “Six Degrees of Farming” game? How many steps would it take to link most consumers to a pork producer or another farmer? The answer’s probably more than we’d like in most instances. Farm and ranch families make up only 2 percent of the U.S. population today, and most of the other 98 percent are two generations – or likely more – removed from the farm.

Meanwhile, consumers want to know more about how the food they put on their tables was grown and raised. Programs such as the Pork Checkoff’s #RealPigFarming social media initiative and the new consumer-directed America’s Pig Farmer of the YearSM award are helping to bridge the information gap. And as of June, Fair Oak’s new Pork Education Center, funded in part by a $2 million Pork Checkoff investment, also is helping to connect with consumers.

The center complements Fair Oak’s established Pig Adventure, which provides visitors a transparent look at a working farrow-to-weaning farm. Through interactive displays and a challenging rope-climbing course, the new 7,000-square-foot Pork Education Center focuses on all-things pork – from nutrition and recipes, to facts about responsible, sustainable pork production and pigs’ contribution to human medicine.

Debbie Burgess of Monee, Illinois, along with her daughter and grandchildren (pictured middle left) visited the Pork Education Center on its opening day. She appreciated how the center helped her grandkids associate the food at the grocery story to the farmers who raise it.

“I knew farmers growing up and learned firsthand about farming, but my grandkids haven’t had that opportunity,” Burgess said. “The center and other Fair Oaks attractions combine facts and fun to give them a perspective on how pigs are raised today. They really have been taking it all in.”

Each and every time pork producers connect with consumers is valuable. Together we can increase understanding and confidence in how pigs are raised today.

— Jan Jorgensen, editor

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Do You Need Some Love?
By Chris Hodges

Next to satisfying our physical needs and feeling safe, a person’s greatest need is to be loved, accepted and respected. As individuals or as an industry, when we are disrespected, rejected and heavily criticized, it hits a nerve. Our natural response is often emotional and defensive because we need to be accepted, respected and, yes, even loved.

Today, America’s pig farmers are respected and accepted by a large group of consumers who love our product. And we have an opportunity to gain greater respect and acceptance by another large group of consumers who want to get to know us better.

The Pork Checkoff’s most recent survey of consumer meat-buying habits and attitudes showed that 29 percent of American households eat more pork than they did just five years ago. And this customer base is very loyal – demonstrating respect and acceptance – to our product and industry.

The survey showed that another 32 percent of households eat pork but less often. They are not quite as loyal or accepting of our product and the pork industry as the top pork lovers are. The remaining two out of five households either buy very little pork or none at all.

Who Are We Listening to?
I have an observation since joining the National Pork Board earlier this year. I think that we, as an industry, give too much time and attention to those who do not buy our product. In fact, we get a bit upset when they say bad things about us.

Public declarations, comments and positions by those who do not accept or respect us – and who do not even buy our product – should not cause us to get angry.

Like everybody else, pig farmers have a deep desire to be accepted. They are dedicated to doing what is right for people, pigs and the planet. Pork producers give back to their communities every day while providing food and fiber to worldwide markets.

This vocation is highly admirable, and pork producers deserve respect for their commitment. But at times, we have to realize that some folks are just not going to “love us.”
Refining our Focus

So what about the 32 percent of households who buy some pork but do not accept or respect our industry as much as the 29 percent of households who do? This is where we need to be even more proactive and share information with consumers who buy pork but may have questions about production practices.

Consumers who are our best customers – the group we call “creative cooks” – consistently remind us how much we have taught them about pork’s versatility and nutrition. They love cooking with pork, and we take great pride in telling them the story of today’s animal care and handling.

One key tool we have to reach these consumers are farmers themselves. By connecting farmers with these pork eaters, we can build on their existing trust and confidence.

Stepping Up Efforts

We recently selected a national public relations agency to help reach these and other hard-to-connect-with consumers through direct contact and both conventional and social media. I am excited about the opportunities ahead.

We intend to leverage our resources to support customers who already love us with even more information and access to our product. Plus, we will increase outreach to the important proverbial “movable-middle” customers.

Our channel customers also are critical as the conduit between processors and the end consumers. They have daily contact with our consumers and also serve to share our story.

Our foodservice and retail customers bear a great resemblance to our consumer groups. One group fully accepts our industry and respects pork producers, while a second group wants to learn more about production methods, food safety, animal welfare and product quality. There’s a third group that has no interest.

We recently reorganized our marketing team to create single points of contact for our largest channel customers. The new team will visit with and engage customers on social responsibility issues, identifying opportunities to sell more pork. I feel that expanding access to the National Pork Board in a very proactive way is the right approach at the right time.

Recent tracking data on retail and foodservice pork sales continue to point upward. We need to remind channel customers about this trend as they consider all the information – and misinformation – they are presented with about pork and the pork industry.

A Positive Story to Tell

We have a positive story to tell – a story of leadership, continuous improvement and product innovation. Every day, farmers produce great pork products in a socially responsible way. That is why it is upsetting to hear someone cut down our industry practices, people and product.

But let’s all keep in mind who buys our product. When we turn away from this story, we risk disconnecting with our very valuable customers. The consumers and customers who buy our product just don’t deserve that.
Can “Bad Press” Impact Consumer Pork Demand?

By Steve Meyer

Thousands of pork producers carefully do the right things for people, pigs and the planet every day on their farms. But negative news stories still pop up alleging everything from the mistreatment of animals in an undercover video to a proposed link between some microbe being resistant to an antibiotic that is useful in keeping pigs healthy and productive.

Whether these news stories prove to be true or are unfounded, what is the impact on the livelihoods of the vast majority of producers who have incorporated the industry’s We Care™ ethical principles into their daily barn culture?

Repeated exposure to negative news stories could cause pork consumers to look elsewhere for their protein needs. This would reduce demand and negatively impact prices in the short run. In the long run, the amount of pork that we can profitably sell would be reduced.

But has “bad press” hurt pork demand? Perhaps and perhaps not.

Before I attempt to explain that mushy-mouthed economist answer, let’s remember that demand for any product is the set of quantities that consumers are willing and able to buy at alternative prices. Each consumer has a set of these price-quantity pairs.

To determine average consumer pork demand, we use average per capita consumption as the quantity variable. As shown in the chart, demand is not just the amount purchased or consumed (per capita pork consumption). It’s a set of price-quantity pairs that collectively define a demand function.

The National Pork Board measures changes in the position of the demand curve by observing year-to-year changes in real per capita expenditures (RPCE) for pork. This is much the same as (and changes almost identically to) the demand indexes first developed by professor Glenn Grimes at the University of Missouri.

**Supply/Demand 101 Basics**

RPCE indicates that pork demand has grown steadily—in spite of news and social media stories perceived as negative for pork. So what’s happening?

First, most consumers may have not heard the negative reports or if they did, the reports did not impact their shopping behavior. Consumer tastes and preferences have shifted toward meat and poultry proteins in recent years due in part to growing interest in dietary protein and to concerns about animal fat from the ’70s and ’80s being debunked.

Positive shifts in preferences clearly have been more important than negative stories. By far, producers and activists on opposite sides of these issues are the most interested parties—producers as pork enterprise operators and activists as, in their own eyes, public servants or, more cynically, people dependent on opposition enterprises.

Most of the rest of the world is not aware. And if they are, they may not care much one way or the other—they simply want their bacon at the best price possible.

Second, while observed changes in the real per capita pork expenditures indicate pork demand has grown sharply in recent years, we do not know how demand may have shifted without negative news stories. Pork demand may have

Steve Meyer is vice president of pork analysis for Express Markets, Inc. Analytics.
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been even stronger if these issues never had happened or been brought to light.

No Easy Answers

Economists can’t easily run experiments because so much of economics depends on human behavior. Instead, economists must draw inferences from market-level data. As more data become available to build econometric models of meat demand, researchers will, no doubt, include variables that measure the severity of negative stories.

If the variables are not significant predictors of demand, the answer would be clear: Consumers did not hear the stories or they did not care. But if they are significant predictors of demand, we will know that positive factors have offset them and the negative ones can be zeroed out to measure what demand would have been without them.

Measuring an impact now is difficult at best.

What we do know is this: Pork demand is better today than it was five years ago in spite of negative incidents in that time span. Pork demand may even be as high as it would have been had the incidents never happened if a) consumers did not notice the incidents or b) they did not care enough to behave differently.

We also know that demand would still be this strong and all parties as well off today had the episodes never happened. While we should not use the demand success of recent years as a reason to dismiss concerns over negative stories, we also shouldn’t assume that consumers share the concerns that we and opposition groups have in these situations.

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Pork Remains Fastest-Growing Protein in Foodservice

With a growth rate that outpaces all other meats, pork has been the fastest-growing protein in foodservice since 2011, according to Technomic, Inc.’s 2015 Volumetric Assessment of Pork in Foodservice. The study showed that total pork sold through foodservice outlets reached a record 9.8 billion pounds, up 533 million pounds from 2013 when the survey was last conducted. This number is slightly higher than the 462 million-pound growth from 2011 to 2013.

The 2.6 percent pork category increase in 2015 outpaced the protein growth average of 0.7 percent and the total foodservice industry growth of 1.2 percent.

“We are pleased to see the continued growth of pork in foodservice,” said Derrick Sleezer, president of the National Pork Board and a producer from Cherokee, Iowa. “The study showed that pork continued to be the strongest performer in the foodservice industry, underscoring its growing popularity.”

Since 2013, processed pork has driven growth of the total pork category, increasing by 2.8 percent on an annual basis and making up 78 percent of the total volume. Sales of fresh pork grew 2.0 percent.

The four largest categories driving growth of the pork category growth were bacon, processed ham, breakfast sausage and ribs. Sales of these products collectively represented 65 percent of total sales on a carcass-weight equivalent.

Other highlights include:

- In categories with both uncooked and pre-cooked pork, uncooked pork use grew at a slightly faster rate than pre-cooked pork over the past two years – 3.4 percent and 3.2 percent, respectively.
- In categories with bone-in and boneless pork, sales of both increased since 2013, with boneless pork sales growing at a slightly faster rate.

“Pork is a versatile protein that is being leveraged around the country by foodservice operators who want to deliver flavor, inspiration and innovation across their menus,” Sleezer said. “Pork producers are proud to provide safe, wholesome products that fit any menu.”

Source: 2015 Volumetric Assessment of Pork in Foodservice, Technomic, Inc.

### Record-High Pork Sales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sales (Billion Pounds)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>8.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>9.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The 2015 pork foodservice category totals 9.8 billion pounds, up 533 million incremental pounds over 2013.

Source: 2015 Volumetric Assessment of Pork in Foodservice, Technomic, Inc.

### Pork Sales Outpace the Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Growth Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Protein</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
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</table>

Pork’s 2.6% increase in incremental pounds exceeds the growth average of all other proteins (0.7%) and total foodservice industry growth (1.2%).

Source: 2015 Volumetric Assessment of Pork in Foodservice, Technomic, Inc.
America Loves Carnita Meat and Pulled Pork

The study showed that of 28 pork product categories reviewed, 19 demonstrated positive sales growth. Carnita meat and pulled pork were the fastest-growing categories, with a compound annual growth rate of 13.2 percent and 13.1 percent, respectively. Both almost doubled since 2013.

Notable growth also was seen in Canadian bacon, bratwurst, shoulder/butt, prosciutto, pork hocks/shanks and chops. Bacon and processed-ham use grew from 2013 to 2015 by 195 million pounds and 93 million pounds, respectively, and were the highest volume among all categories.

“When it comes to the three major foodservice dayparts, breakfast leads the way with pork gaining popularity at lunch and dinner,” Sleezer said. “It’s clear that pork is on the menu across all foodservice segments.”

Full-service and limited-service restaurants represent two-thirds of all pork volume sold.

“It’s encouraging to see how Pork Checkoff-funded efforts are helping to maintain and build interest in menuing pork across the country,” Sleezer said.
Pulling Pork Is Winning Over Bacon-Lovers …

By Claire Masker

Move over bacon, pulled pork has found its way onto menus across America, and consumers can’t get enough of it. According to Technomic, Inc.’s 2015 Vol- umetric Assessment of Pork in Foodservice, pulled pork was one of the fastest-growing pork product categories, with a compound annual growth rate of 13.1 percent.

“Pulled pork continues to grow in popularity among foodservice operators,” said Neel Sahni, manager of foodservice and innovation for the Pork Checkoff. “Because of the cooking process, pulled pork offers a good shelf life and holds up well on a service line.”

Pulled pork’s versatility makes it easy to use in menu items from pizza, to burritos to tossed with pasta. In 2014, pulled pork was on 17.8 percent of restaurant menus, up from 10.6 percent in 2005, according to market research from Datassential.

The Pork Checkoff works with foodservice operators to showcase the versatility of pork on menus and recently worked with Wendy’s to test pulled pork at 229 locations for a four-week period. The Checkoff provided support for training staff, window advertising and in-store point-of-purchase materials.

After a successful test, Wendy’s offered BBQ Pulled Pork items in all 6,000 restaurants nationwide. Wendy’s BBQ Pulled Pork Trio – BBQ Pulled Pork Sandwich, BBQ Pulled Pork Cheeseburger and BBQ Pulled Pork Cheese Fries – quickly joined the ranks of the brand’s most successful limited-time offers, Sahni said.

“The Pork Checkoff will continue to showcase pork’s affordability, availability and versatility to restaurant chains,” Sahni said. “As demand for unique, regional and ethnic cuisines continues to rise, you’ll see more pork, including pulled pork, on menus.”

… But Don’t Count Bacon Out

Mention bacon, and people take notice. Bacon is still the “it” ingredient at many restaurants nationwide, where new, bacon-inspired menu items continue to captivate the palate of American consumers.

“The bacon craze seems to be maturing,” said Stephen Gerike, director of foodservice marketing for the Pork Checkoff. “We’re seeing uses of bacon that are more creative and less far-fetched than sundaes and donuts. Hickory-smoked and thick-cut bacon are widely promoted, and bacon is still being added to menu items to increase flavor and texture of dishes.”

A few years ago, bacon became one of America’s most inescapable food foods with its own wacky dishes and cult-like following. While some said the cured-pork craze went too far, bacon has retained its place as one of the best-selling meats in America.

“The bacon trend shows no sign of slowing,” Gerike said. “Bacon has proven it can drive traffic to existing brands and add profit to premium menu items.”

For example, the Little Caesars pizza chain recently unveiled a deep-dish pizza wrapped in thick-cut bacon, and Starbucks debuted its double-smoked bacon breakfast sandwich.

“We work with restaurant chains to include bacon, ham and sausage as ingredients and flavor enhancers,” Gerike said. “With strong sales, never underestimate the power of bacon.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Recipe</th>
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<tr>
<td>MON</td>
<td>Rain-or-Shine Pulled Pork and Pimiento Cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUES</td>
<td>Hot and Sweet Cuban Sandwich</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEDNESDAY</td>
<td>Smoky Hot Chops with Cool Cucumber-Tomato Salad</td>
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<tr>
<td>THURS</td>
<td>Perfect Day Pork and Black Bean Nachos</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRI</td>
<td>Easy, Breezy Honey-Chipotle Pork Kabobs</td>
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Rain or shine, get your daily recipe Porkcast at PorkBeInspired.com/Porkcast
The Pork Checkoff’s Neel Sahni discusses pork cuts and menuing ideas at the University of Michigan. Presentations are scheduled at the University of Northern Iowa and other campuses later this year.
Cooking with Yale Foodies

Some students are ahead of the curve though. “In the past 10 years, students have been coming to college with a broader understanding of foods and food issues,” said Ronald DeSantis, director of culinary excellence at Yale University. “Our menus are created with the foodie student in mind.”

Yale University’s menu development process includes global flavors, an increase in plant-based options, bold flavors including spiciness, higher-quality animal proteins and a selection of vendors that ensure the humane treatment of animals.

Yale University foodservice professionals and the Foodies student group recently worked with the Pork Checkoff to fabricate a pork carcass and to develop a six-course, all-pork meal. “We highlighted newer pork cuts and paired them with delicious vegetable and grain dishes,” said DeSantis, who appreciates pork’s flavor and versatility. “I particularly liked bringing the students into the kitchen to see the process.”

The Checkoff is helping put more pork on college foodservice menus.

Pork Delivers on All Counts

“When we’re able to use pork in every cuisine possible,” noted Greenburg, who can source local pork or purchase commercial products through vendors. “Pork is also a good value, compared to other proteins.”

Greenburg values the information and inspiration the National Pork Board provides college and university foodservice professionals. “When Neel came to campus, he was very generous with his time as he helped us learn about a variety of pork cuts and prepare them in new ways,” he said. “We’re looking forward to incorporating under-utilized pork cuts into more menu options this fall.”

Customization is key, added Greenburg, an Iowa Taste of Elegance winner who became interested in working with Sahni after attending the Pork Checkoff’s Pork Summit. “Anything we can make to order is going to be popular with our students,” he said.

University of Missouri Personalizes Pork Options

Eric Cartwright, executive chef at the University of Missouri, can relate to the need for customization. “One of the biggest desires of our students today is personalization,” Cartwright said. “We prepare food that’s made just for them.”

Today’s students are also becoming more adventurous in their eating choices. “What would have seemed foreign to them 10 years ago is now standard fare,” said Cartwright, who appreciates pork’s versatility and value. “The variety and quality of pork cuts available makes it an easy fit into almost any menu application.”

The University of Missouri’s culinary team has offered innovative options, including Pig Wings made from pork shank meat and Pork Secreto made from marbled pork brisket with mushrooms, herbs and oven-roasted tomatoes. Pork isn’t just for the center of the plate, however. It can easily be incorporated in small amounts as a seasoning. “When you use bacon or country ham, pork can elevate a dish from good to great,” Cartwright said.

The National Pork Board’s willingness to work with campus foodservice and learn their specific needs is invaluable, he added. “Pork Board specialists are experts in the field and always reference the farmers they represent,” Cartwright said. “I appreciate their willingness to invest time and resources to help us succeed.”

University of Iowa Offers New Pork Menu Items

Pork’s versatility also shines at the University of Iowa, where meal options range from traditional, home-style foods to Asian cuisines to burrito bars.

“Today’s students have grown up eating in restaurants, and their expectations of campus dining are similar to what they have experienced in restaurant dining,” said Barry Greenburg, an executive chef at the University of Iowa. “We develop menu items with the idea that food needs to taste great, look great and be on trend.”

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Checkoff Partnered with Walmart for Summer Grilling Promotion

By Claire Masker

Consumers were encouraged to grill pork when they fired up their grills this summer, thanks to Walmart’s high-impact grilling promotion with the Pork Checkoff.

“This was the fifth year in a row that we partnered with Walmart on a summer grilling promotion,” said Rob Kirchofer, director of retail marketing and innovation for the Pork Checkoff. “The partnership with Walmart continues to get bigger and better every year by accelerating pork sales and tapping into consumers’ passion for grilling.

Walmart highlighted various fresh pork cuts in the promotion and encouraged consumers to find everything they needed for their grilling holiday with pork. The “Pork’s Got Your Grill Covered” promotion began in mid-March and ran through Labor Day. In addition to the traditional grilling holidays of Memorial Day, Father’s Day, the Fourth of July and Labor Day, the campaign encouraged consumers to celebrate grilling all season long.

The promotion allowed the Pork Checkoff and Walmart to execute a full-scale promotion that incorporated many different marketing tools, including in-store signage, social media and digital ads. Contributing to the sales impact, the integrated marketing effort delivered over 90 million impressions, or people who saw the campaign, according to Kirchofer.

Consumers Reached Online

Accompanying the in-store promotions was a massive online presence, including online advertisements, a blogger outreach and a custom micro-site.

“Consumers are online looking for unique recipes and sharing photographs of their grilling creations,” said Amy Busch, digital marketing manager for the Pork Checkoff. “It was important to anchor the promotion with an online component to increase the power of this

BBQ pitmasters Moe Cason (right) and Tuffy Stone helped consumers celebrate pork on the grill this summer.
pork producer investment.”

The online micro-site, found at GrillPork.org, allowed consumers to share and see how others celebrated grilling this summer. GrillPork.org offered pork recipes and grilling tips from BBQ Pitmasters Moe Cason and Tuffy Stone. The site encouraged consumers to visit Walmart for all of their grilling needs.

“Cason and Stone have made their mark as competitors on the barbecue circuit and through their cable TV show, BBQ Pitmasters, on the Destination America channel,” Kirchofer said. “Both are big fans of putting pork on the grill. Consumers and fans love to hear their grilling tips and try out their recipes.”

The Checkoff also partnered with 12 influential bloggers. They developed unique, high-quality recipes, promoted pork purchases and shared their Walmart in-store experiences across the many different grilling holidays.

As part of the Checkoff’s multi-cultural marketing, the promotion included a blogger outreach effort that targeted African-American consumers. The Checkoff worked with a second group of 12 bloggers in key markets.

“The partnership with Walmart allowed us to educate more consumers about the many fresh cuts of pork that they can enjoy,” said Randy Brown, a member of the Pork Checkoff Domestic Marketing Committee and a farmer from Nevada, Ohio.

“Our goal is to expand long-term pork demand,” Brown said. “This is even more important as we continue to see ample pork supplies available to consumers in the coming months.”

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In July, the Pork Checkoff’s retail marketing team hosted 20 leaders from 11 key U.S. supermarket retailers for the third annual pork education tour. The group headed to Indiana for two in-depth days of product and pork production education.

The event included farm tours at Fair Oaks Pig Adventure and at Legan Livestock and Grain, Inc., in Filmore. Also, National Pork Board member David Newman, assistant professor animal science at North Dakota State University (NDSU), and Austen Germolus, NDSU meat lab manager, were guest presenters at Purdue University for a Pork 101 session that focused on quality and consistency issues in the industry.

National Pork Board Vice President Jan Archer, Goldsboro, North Carolina, provided Pork Quality Assurance® Plus and Transport Quality Assurance® training and certification.

“This was a great opportunity to provide hands-on pork education to our retailer partners and to allow them to meet and have an open dialogue with the farmers who are producing the pork they sell in their stores,” said Rob Kirchofer, director of retail marketing and innovation for the Pork Checkoff.

During the first day of the tour, the group participated in a private tour of Fair Oaks Pig Adventure led by Malcom DeKryger, president and co-owner of Belstra Milling, De Motte, Indiana. DeKryger addressed pork production questions from the retailer group and highlighted the different production and housing methods used at the Pig Adventure.

Answering Questions on Antibiotic Use

The use of antibiotics in livestock production was a common concern of the retailers on the tour. DeKryger shared antibiotic alternatives used by both Fair Oaks and Belstra Milling, in addition to production practices the farms have in place to minimize antibiotic use in raising pigs.

“We believe that it is important for our pigs to get the best daily care possible, and for us, that also includes the use of preventive antibiotics in raising our pigs,” DeKryger told the group.

For first-generation farmers Mark and Phyllis Legan, hosting a farm tour and dinner at their farm with the nation’s top retailers offered the opportunity to highlight their values and farm practices.

Speaking to the group outside of his farrowing barns, Legan said, “For us, it’s about transparency. It is important for you to see how we raise our pigs and to learn how we work closely with our veterinarian to make decisions on antibiotic use or housing of sows.”

He added, “Today, we hope you ask us any questions you may have about what you’re seeing in our barns or about decisions your company has made in sourcing pork.”

The Legans farm with their daughter and son-in-law, Beth and Nick Tharp, about 45 minutes west of
Indianapolis. Their sow farm has 3,000 sows and generates over 17 million pounds of pork each year at other farm partner locations in Indiana. During the farm tour, the Legans and the farm employees had the opportunity to share information with the group about their farm operation, including the use of breeding stalls, group pens for sows and farrowing stalls. Max Rodibaugh, the Legans’ farm veterinarian, provided a veterinarian’s perspective on animal care and decision-making on the farm. Also, a dinner hosted on the farm by the Legans after the tour was a highlight of many attendees.

“The transparency demonstrated by producers during the two farm visits will leave a positive impact on these retailers, which will help create and strengthen our pork partnerships with them,” Kirchofer said. “The educational tour is a great example of how producers are working with retailers through the Pork Checkoff to build consumer demand and improve their perceptions of modern pork production.”

Left: Retailers listen attentively to Mark Legan, Indiana pork producer, before entering the barns for a farm tour at Legan Livestock & Grain, LLC. Above: David Newman presents a pork carcass demonstration and pork quality grading session to retailer attendees at Purdue University.

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Building on years of supporting responsible antibiotic use, the National Pork Board has adopted a new three-point antibiotic stewardship plan (on right) that is proactive, collaborative and aggressive in its strategy and scope. Using education, research and communication tactics, the plan will ultimately work for the betterment of people, pigs and the planet.

The National Pork Board will lead industry efforts to phase out the growth-promotion use of medically important antibiotics and to embrace increased veterinary oversight on farms.

“Although the federal government’s initiatives on antibiotics pose new challenges for the industry, U.S. pig farmers pledge to go above and beyond compliance,” said National Pork Board President Derrick Sleezer, Cherokee, Iowa. “More than ever, farmers remain committed to continuous improvement to ensure responsible on-farm antibiotic use.”

To help producers achieve this goal, the National Pork Board will continue to implement a comprehensive plan to help guide and support the responsible use of antibiotics. The long-standing Pork Quality Assurance® Plus (PQA Plus®) program will serve as the centerpiece of this effort. The certification program is being revised and expanded to reflect the latest federal guidance on antibiotics, including veterinary oversight and maintenance of current medical records on the farm.

Additional efforts will include ongoing collaboration with allied-industry partners, suppliers and regulatory agencies to help ensure that antibiotics needed for animal health remain in place and are used under veterinary oversight as called for in the industry guidance.

“The National Pork Board’s overarching goal is to protect pig health and promote food safety,” Sleezer said. “Healthy animals make for safer food, and implementing this plan will help America’s pork producers achieve this goal.”

As part of the new stewardship plan, the National Pork Board has redefined its position statement and governing policy emphasizing the industry’s commitment to using antibiotics responsibly to protect both animal health and human health.
Three-Point Antibiotic Stewardship Plan

EDUCATION:
- The National Pork Board will collaborate with allied partners, including swine veterinarians, feed organizations, breed associations and show-pig groups, animal health companies and associated commodity groups to develop educational materials for more than 60,000 pork producers and the academic and swine veterinarian community about the new FDA regulations and antibiotic stewardship.
- The National Pork Board will revise and give added emphasis to antibiotic stewardship in the industry’s Pork Quality Assurance® Plus (PQA Plus®) program. PQA Plus certification includes best practices on swine health and welfare, public health and worker health and environmental sustainability. This action will ensure that America’s pork producers understand the importance of the veterinarian-client-patient relationship and are prepared to implement the new changes to antibiotic use.
- Throughout 2016, the National Pork Board will use paid and earned media opportunities to help educate farmers about FDA’s new rules and the steps required for compliance.
- Collaboration and investment with like-minded organizations will help increase the reach and frequency of educational antibiotic messages.

RESEARCH:
- The National Pork Board will make antibiotic use and resistance a top research priority in its 2016 budget. Since 2000, the Pork Checkoff has invested $5.3 million in research on the epidemiology of antibiotic resistance, as well as efforts to define alternatives to antibiotic use. The board will invest an additional $1 million for new research in 2016.
- The Pork Board will identify specific risk assessments to better understand the relationship between antibiotic use in pork production and bacterial resistance. This research will augment past studies on interventions and alternatives, with the goal of reducing the need for antibiotics.
- In addition to the Pork Board’s existing producer committee of experts, a blue-ribbon task force of nationally recognized experts will be created to focus on antibiotic use and resistance. The goal of the task force is to objectively review and to provide recommendations on Pork Checkoff policies and programs.
- The Pork Board will continue to work closely with federal agencies and other commodity group partners to research and identify models and metrics that will provide value to the pork industry for continual improvement of antibiotic use.

COMMUNICATION OUTREACH:
- Communication regarding antibiotics to all segments of the pork chain will continue to be a main emphasis for the National Pork Board, with special emphasis on informing pig farmers about the upcoming new FDA rules. Pork Checkoff publications include a quarterly magazine, monthly newsletters, research e-newsletters, web-based articles, fact sheets, the pork.org website (Antibiotics Resource Center), radio broadcasts, online videos and social media.
- The National Pork Board will continue to proactively work with all national and international media that are interested in U.S. pork production and serve as a resource on how U.S. pig farmers use antibiotics responsibly.
- The National Pork Board will continue to share the industry’s progress with retailers and foodservice companies that are interested in antibiotic use in pork production and to provide credible responses to their inquiries.
- Ongoing outreach will continue to all state pork associations to help share antibiotic news and information with farmers and state-level allied industries.
- Collaboration with the American Association of Swine Veterinarians, the National Pork Producers Council, the American Feed Industry Association, land-grant universities and others will coordinate and amplify the National Pork Board’s communications efforts.
Manure pit safety has to be a priority each and every day on the farm to avoid tragic accidents, according to experts at the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health in Iowa City, Iowa.

In the center’s new fact sheet, *Manure Storage Pit Dangers: Hazardous Gas Awareness*, experts explain how deadly manure pit gases are and the dangers they pose to barn workers. The complementary fact sheet, *Manure Storage Pit Dangers: Identifying Hazardous Gases*, also serves as a valuable resource to help implement safety protocols.

Gases that are released during decomposition and agitation of swine manure can create special safety concerns, but you can protect the health of your employees, your livestock and yourself with some simple precautions.

**An Industry-wide Issue**

“It’s important to provide an environment that encourages safety awareness and compliance,” said Todd See, animal science department head and professor at North Carolina State University. “You can minimize accidents by taking a proactive approach to safety.”

He offers the following safety tips:

• Do not enter an area in which hazardous levels of toxic gases are suspected. Dilute toxic gases by maintaining proper ventilation and bringing fresh air into the contaminated area using fans and opening curtains, doors and windows.

• Wear a respirator or dust mask while performing work anywhere you may be exposed to harmful dusts, gases or sprays. Respirators and dust masks help block the entry of harmful gases and dust into the lungs.

• Protect yourself with a supplied-air respirator—either an air-line respirator or self-contained breathing apparatus—if it’s necessary to enter an area in which hazardous levels of a toxic gas are suspected or if you must enter a confined space such as a manure pit.

• Realize that a number of gases can create health issues for humans and hogs. Agitation of liquid manure that has been stored for more than a few weeks will release levels of gases that can be toxic, flammable and potentially lethal.

The Pork Checkoff’s Safe Manure Removal Practices fact sheet, found online at [pork.org](http://pork.org), also offers tips about the five main gases of concern in manure pits.
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Putting the Gears in Motion

Producers focus on professionalism to build consumer trust and boost productivity

By Darcy Maulsby

Tim Friedel was sure it wouldn’t work. When a new employee suggested changing the matting system in the farrowing barn so the piglets wouldn’t get chilled, the idea seemed too illogical. Too prone to creating more challenges than it would solve. Too likely to fail. After all, what could a new employee with no livestock background and only a few weeks of work experience know about swine management?

“She proved me wrong,” said Friedel, production manager of Thomas Livestock Co. (TLC) of Broken Bow, Nebraska, which has three sow farms and will soon open a fourth farm.

Mats in the farrowing stalls typically had been removed once pigs were five to six days old. While the piglets became too hot on the mats, the contrast between the warm mats and the cooler air coming from below chilled the piglets. The employee thought that adding a second mat below the flooring of the farrowing stall could solve this issue. The employee thought that adding a second mat below the flooring of the farrowing stall could solve this issue.

Although Friedel thought this system would be hard to clean and could lead to disease problems, he tried it anyway. It worked. Since the early 1990s, TLC has used a double-mat system with a top mat that can be removed as the piglets grow.

“It turns out that this mat system is easy to clean, easy

Ethical Principles

- Produce safe food
- Protect and promote animal well-being
- Ensure practices to protect public health
- Provide a work environment that is safe
- Safeguard natural resources
- Contribute to a better quality of life in our communities
Internships Inspire Careers in the Pork Industry

By Morgan Weinrich, a 2015 Pork Checkoff Communication intern

The pork industry offers diverse career opportunities for young professionals. To help young people learn about different career options, the Pork Checkoff and other farms and companies offer internships to students considering careers in the pork industry.

“The Checkoff gains fresh ideas coming from bright, young talented college students that offer a great perspective,” said the Pork Checkoff’s Bill Winkelman. “Pork Checkoff interns have gained the knowledge and skills to be able to speak to their friends and neighbors about the value that the pork industry brings.”

After completing summer internships, many past interns have stayed in the pork industry and even have taken posts at the Pork Checkoff. For example, Stacy Revels was a 2005 producer services intern. She later went on to work full-time for the Pork Checkoff and most recently received her law degree from the University of Alabama School of Law. She is now the staff assistant in the office of the administrator at the USDA Risk Management Agency.

“My experiences with the Pork Checkoff helped me stand out from hundreds of other students,” Revels said. “This helped me to gain additional internships and experience throughout my time in law school. I am very thankful for the opportunity and valuable lessons I learned during my internship and full-time position.”

Each summer Pork Checkoff interns are selected to work on a variety of projects to increase their knowledge of the pork industry. This summer the Checkoff hosted five interns who assisted with projects that will benefit the pork industry for years to come, Winkelman said.
what they’ll see in the barns, explain the jobs they will handle, and define expectations for this work.

“Also, let new employees know there’s room for growth, from ongoing training to advancement opportunities,” Winkelman said. “Highlight the fact that this is a career in the pork industry, not just a job.”

• Look beyond standard operating procedures (SOPs) – While SOPs are useful, they are guidelines, not iron-clad rules.

“We don’t want to kill people’s spirit of innovation,” said Friedel, who noted that TLC has 185 employees and will have 240 when the company’s fourth sow farm opens in 2017. “We encourage employees to focus on continuous improvement and to look for better ways to do things.”

• Focus on animal well-being – Doing the right things to protect animals’ health creates a less stressful environment for pigs and the people who care for them.

“Providing 24-hour care for the pigs and towing off the newborns make a big difference in piglet survival,” Friedel said. These two practices have allowed TLC to consistently get over 30-pigs-per-sow per-year.

“Attention to detail is important,” he added. “If you do the little things right, it will add up.”

• Enhancing employee retention. Keeping good employees isn’t all about salary levels.

“Research shows that recognition is the No. 1 thing employees want,” said Winkelman, who noted that this research dates back to the late 1940s and has been verified by subsequent studies. “Employees want appreciation for a job well done and want to feel that they play a role in something bigger.”

Friedel said that making decisions that are good for TLC’s employees will also benefit the pigs.

“If one of our employees asks for something that will help them do their job better and take better care of the pigs, we’ll make it happen,” Friedel said. “You need to give employees the tools they need to do a good job.”

Also, employees tend to be much more engaged when they know the company’s leaders and feel well informed about what’s going on in the business.

“You can never over communicate,” Winkelman said. “Don’t just note how the company is doing financially or say that the farm’s conception rates are up and mortality rates are down. Explain how employees’ actions are impacting these results.”

• Promote leadership development – Provide proper resources and support to employees who are advancing their careers within the company. The Pork Checkoff offers two valuable resources for ongoing training, including the Professional Swine Manager program and Certified Swine Manager program (page 34).

“People tend to get promoted because they are good at their job, but they often need to learn additional skills when they become managers,” Winkelman said. “It’s important to help them develop the skills they need to succeed, such as effective communication and team building.”

These factors contribute to a higher level of professionalism in the pork industry that benefits pigs and people.

“Professionalism gives producers and our customers confidence that the right things are being done in every barn every day,” Winkelman said.

“We’ve talked about We Care™ for years, but what’s the next step? Professionalism puts these values into action and reflects employee engagement through the high standards of animal care and other core competencies that help build consumer trust.”

Pork Checkoff’s Bill Winkelman
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IF YOU HAD A DAY LIKE MINE, YOU’D NEED A DRINK TOO.
Creating a Positive Barn Culture

By Darcy Maulsby

While it’s invaluable to learn from other pork producers, it’s also helpful to discover how other industries promote professionalism. This knowledge can foster a more positive, productive barn culture.

“Barn culture builds on the pork industry’s We Care™ ethical principles,” said Karen Hoare, director of producer learning and development for the Pork Checkoff. “Barn culture will help engage employees in their work and encourage a higher standard of caring for people and animals.”

Pork Checkoff team members traveled to California earlier this year to study best-management practices from several industries and see how they can be applied to the pork industry.

“We met with some of the best dairy farmers, vineyard owners and cheese factories in the region to see what works for them,” said Bill Winkelman, vice president of producer and industry relations for the Pork Checkoff.

In some cases, the group picked up new ideas that can be adapted to the pork industry. In other cases, the trip confirmed that pork producers are on the right track with their existing practices.

“The things we learned about professionalism from some of the best producers in the nation will help the pork industry enhance barn culture, which in turn benefits pigs and people,” Winkelman said.

“What we learned will help us share more stories that resonate with today’s consumers and demonstrate that pork producers are firmly committed to the We Care ethical principles,” Winkelman added.
Simple Strategies Enhance Employee Engagement

The success of any business is closely connected to motivated employees. How can you support hardworking, happy employees who contribute to greater productivity and profitability?

“One key is to create stronger connections between the owner and senior management and the people working in the barns,” said Karen Hoare, director of producer learning and development for the Pork Checkoff. “This helps improve employee engagement.”

Here are ways pork producers are enhancing employee engagement and promoting a positive barn culture:

- **Hourly wages** – An hourly wage rather than a salary can be a good fit for many employees, said Tim Friedel, production manager of Thomas Livestock Co. (TLC) of Broken Bow, Nebraska.

  “In our experience, people are usually willing to put in the extra work to do the job right. In this way, an hourly wage benefits both the employee and the pigs,” Friedel said.

- **Reloadable Visa cards** – Minnesota-based Pipestone System uses reloadable BlazePays Visa Prepaid Cards for payroll. The cards streamline biweekly payroll processing for nearly 150 of the 700 employees at Pipestone System. The cards, which are automatically reloaded each pay period, also allow Pipestone to better serve its geographically dispersed employees. The system is less expensive and more convenient than cutting and mailing checks, said Colette DeSchepper, accountant of Pipestone System.

- **Financial incentive programs and other perks** – Some farms offer financial incentives for the number and quality of pigs sold, Hoare said. Others provide employees with pork at holidays. At TLC, employees are able to purchase stock in TLC after five years of working for the company.

  “Ownership begins long before that, though,” Friedel said. “We encourage employees to treat it as if it’s their own farm.”

- **Internships and continuing education** – Some farms offer internships to help young people and newcomers learn about the pork industry. Existing employees can expand their knowledge and technical skills through online courses, such as the Professional Swine Manager and Certified Swine Manager programs. “Pork production is a great industry with lots of interesting career opportunities,” Hoare said. “It’s important to give people the chance to learn and grow.”
World-Class Professionalism
Pete Neigebauer Teaches the Secrets to Swine Industry Success
By Darcy Maulsby

Imagine you’re an average American grocery shopper, or a buyer in a foreign country. What factors would influence your decision to buy U.S. pork? “People want to know the pork they’re buying is a safe product that’s raised in a humane, responsible, environmentally sound way,” said Pete Neigebauer, an agribusiness instructor at South Central College (SCC) in Mankato, Minnesota.

“I want people around the world to associate U.S. pork with highly trained professionals who advocate for animal well-being and food safety,” he said.

That’s why Neigebauer works with the Pork Checkoff to coordinate the Professional Swine Management (PSM) course offered online through SCC (page 34). We recently caught up with Neigebauer to learn more about how professionalism is taking the pork industry to the next level.

Q: What defines professionalism in the swine industry?
A: There are two key areas of professionalism, including a producer focus that involves animal well-being and standard operating procedures. The second area involves an external focus on consumers, who may have little or no idea how the food they purchase at the grocery store or restaurant is produced. Professionalism involves living the swine industry’s We CareSM values, which define how producers represent the industry every day on farms across America.

Q: Why is it important for the pork industry to focus on professionalism?
A: We need to emphasize professionalism to ensure animal well-being, a positive work environment for employees and proper biosecurity, which all contribute to a safe, healthy food supply. Not only will this help the pork industry here in America, but it will also benefit us overseas. Today, 25 percent of U.S. pork is exported, and we’d like to increase this market share.

Q: How can continuing education raise the level of professionalism in the swine industry?
A: Many farms do a good job with standard operating procedures, but continuing education, including the PSM curriculum, helps expand students’ knowledge so they can do a better job with animal well-being, biosecurity and responsible food production. The training also prepares participants to become more effective advocates for the industry and to be able to discuss the benefits of pork as a protein source.

Q: What are some of the key concepts shared through PSM classes?
A: The PSM curriculum focuses on competencies that are important for a successful swine manager, including breeding stock management, grow-finish management, employee issues, facility operation/maintenance and swine records. We provide a wealth of information, from swine health to budgets to employee coaching, with training materials from the Pork Checkoff. I also use a lot of case studies based on real-world situations. “What-if” questions allow students to role play and increase their problem-solving skills.

Q: What are the benefits of online training?
A: It’s convenient, and there are no biosecurity issues. Students across the country can interact with instructors and other students through video conferencing, live chat sessions and message boards. The training is offered on an ongoing basis throughout the year, and participants can earn an academic certification through PSM. There is a good mix of assistant managers, newer employees, and recent college graduates who want to develop their technical skills in the swine industry. Participants like learning from each other, as well as from the instructors.

Q: Anything else you’d like to add about professionalism in the pork industry?
A: Professionalism and ongoing training help producers do the right thing for pigs and people. I’d like to see the U.S. pork industry become known worldwide for the professionalism of its pork producers.
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- Cattle - Multiple-Day Therapy: Enroflox 100 is indicated for the treatment of bovine respiratory disease (BRD) associated with Mannheimia haemolytica, Pasteurella multocida and Histophilus somni in beef and non-lactating dairy cattle.
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- Swine: Animals intended for human consumption must not be slaughtered within 5 days of receiving a single-injection dose.

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Ready to take the next steps up the career ladder? Take a look at the Professional Swine Manager (PSM) program and Certified Swine Manager (CSM) programs.

“These educational programs help you master the skills you need to be successful in the swine industry,” said Bill Winkelman, vice president of producer and industry relations for the Pork Checkoff.

The PSM program is a joint venture of the Pork Checkoff and the U.S. Pork Center of Excellence. It is targeted toward current pork production employees, as well as community college students who plan to work in pork production. PSM courses, which are offered online through South Central College in Mankato, Minnesota, cover all aspects of swine production and management-level responsibilities. Courses include:

- Nursery and finishing management
- Breeding stock management
- Facility maintenance
- Swine record systems
- Employer/employee issues
- Agribusiness internship

Become a Certified Swine Manager

Whether you’re a swine operation manager, an employee seeking a promotion or a student interested in a career in the swine industry, the Pork Checkoff’s CSM Program also can help put you on the fast track to success.

“This unique program helps develop knowledgeable, skilled employees who embody the pork industry’s We Care™ ethical principles,” said Karen Hoare, director of producer learning and development for the Pork Checkoff.

Certifications include a CSM in swine reproduction and a CSM in wean-to-finish production. To become a CSM, you must pass a written exam with 150 multiple-choice questions to verify knowledge, skills and competence in swine production.

The exam, administered online by the Pork Checkoff and overseen by the supervisor, addresses management-level responsibilities and technical knowledge in sow-farm management, wean-to-finish management, facility operation and maintenance, human resource management and production records.

Students also must complete a practical-skills assessment by submitting documentation approved by their supervisor listing competencies mastered that are specific to reproduction management or wean-to-finish management.

“The CSM program demonstrates your commitment to be a part of the professional workforce that’s evolving in the swine industry,” Hoare said. “It can also lead to opportunities for promotion into leadership management positions.”

For More Details...

Learn more about the CSM program visit pork.org or call (800) 456-7675.
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- Don Johnson, Vice President Electrical Production Services

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Sorry, but you’re going to have to wait... but just until Oct. 7. That’s when America will learn who is named the inaugural America’s Pig Farmer of the Year™.

For now, we know that four deserving pig farmers (supported by their families and employees) are finalists. You can learn more about them and their farms on the following pages.

The new award was unveiled in March at the Pork Industry Forum in San Antonio, Texas. In six short months, the program is off to a fast start, with the first-ever recipient to be named during National Pork Month in October.

The Pork Industry Environmental Stewards awards program, which is the predecessor of the new program, focused on detailed analysis of how each applicant managed his or her farm. The America’s Pig Farmer of the Year award builds on this by adding the rigors of a common industry audit and two preliminary rounds of interviews that went beyond an online questionnaire to add a consumer-focused scope.

“The new program merges technical proficiency and public relations ability,” said Brad Greenway, past National Pork Board vice president and chair of the task force that oversaw the creation of the America’s Pig Farmer of the Year award program.

“Today, it’s not enough to just do things right on the farm,” Greenway said. “We also have to be able to tell our story to the American consumer in a way that’s transparent and relatable, and this program will help us find producers who can achieve that goal.”

Third-Party Credibility
Building on its commitment to grow consumer trust in all aspects of U.S. pork production, the Pork Checkoff named a diverse group of experts to select the first-ever America’s Pig Farmer of the Year winner.

“The overarching goal was to select judges that showcase where the industry has been, as well as where it’s going in terms of collaboration and transparency,” said Mike King, director of science communications for the Pork Checkoff.

“We’re pleased to have such a diverse and impres-
sive group of experts to judge the finalists,” said Derrick Sleezer, National Pork Board president and pig farmer from Cherokee, Iowa.

“It was important to us to create a unique judging panel that was objective and brought a whole new level of diversity of views to the table,” Sleezer said. “And with this group, we think we accomplished that goal.

As a judging panel member Robin Ganzert said, “I am honored to have been asked to serve as a judge for America’s Pig Farmer of the Year. American Humane Association celebrates all those, including our nation’s farmers, who care for animals and work hard to ensure they are treated humanely. Today, more than ever it is important not only to point out where progress is needed, but to recognize when we get it right. I applaud these farmers who are working to give America’s families food that is safe, affordable, abundant, and in line with their values.”

Joining Ganzert as a judge is the World Wildlife Fund’s Carlos Saviani, who said, “I’m really excited for the opportunity to participate in this new award and to learn more about how the pork industry and pig farmers are concerned, dealing with and addressing sustainability.”

Final Steps Build Excitement

At press time, the four finalists in the contest were set to meet with the expert panel of judges in Chicago on Sept. 1. The judges will score the videos of each of the finalists’ farms and then conduct in-person interviews.

Consumers also will be able to cast online votes for their favorite farmer at americaspigfarmer.com from Sept. 1 through 10. The videos will remain on the site post-judging, so be sure to check them out. The winner will be announced Oct. 7 in New York City.

“We want to gain the attention of as many consumers as possible with this positive story, and New York City offers the perfect platform,” King said. “Chris Soules, celebrity spokesman for the award, will be on hand to help generate additional publicity and interest.”

Look for more about the winner in the next issue of Pork Checkoff Report.
On a Mission to Speak Up for Pork
Marti Knoblock – Rock Rapids, Iowa

For Marti Knoblock, it would be easier to stay in his comfort zone by focusing on his family’s northwest Iowa farm and not worrying about consumers. However, as one of the family owners of GMC Farms, he knows that it’s important to join other farmers in speaking up for the industry that has meant so much to him and to multiple generations of the Knoblock and Metzger families.

Founded in 1980, GMC Farms is co-owned by Marti and his brothers, Mitch Knoblock and Morris Metzger. However, the farm’s pork production is largely managed by Marti and his wife Martha, who have six children. Glen and Joyce Metzger, Marti’s parents, remain active in the farm as well.

With their family and long-time employee Dudley Knobloch (similar name but no relation to the Knoblocks), GMC Farms raises pigs in modern slatted, curtain-sided buildings with deep pits and markets 23,000 pigs annually. The family also raises corn, soybeans and cattle, with all of the enterprises meticulously monitored and managed.

“Farming has always been a way of life for my family,” Knoblock said. “It was instilled in me from a young age that it is our God-given right to care for these animals to the best of our ability and to provide the people of the world with a wholesome product. That’s why it’s so important to me to tell our story to those beyond the farm gate.”

With Knoblock’s passion for pork production and ability to connect with people, he’s at home talking to others about how he and his family raise pigs. It was a natural fit for him to apply for the America’s Pig Farmer of the Year award.

“I’m excited to be a finalist for this award,” Knoblock said. “The possibility of connecting more with the public about how we raise pigs is something I look forward to doing. It’s about telling today’s consumers about modern pig farming and how we care for our animals as we address their questions.”

For Knoblock, raising healthy pigs starts even before they enter his wean-to-finish barns. He works with the farm’s veterinarian to create a herd-health action plan for each group of pigs. The plan, which is paired with strict biosecurity guidelines, has helped reduce the need to use herd-health products.

Pig care remains a top priority all the way to market. GMC Farms has its own semi-trailers and follows Transport Quality Assurance guidelines. This allows Knoblock to retain direct control in how pigs are handled, resulting in better care of animals on the way to market.

“We respect and value pigs throughout their life cycle,” Knoblock said. “We care for pigs at the farm with the goal of providing safe pork product for consumers here and around the world.”

“It’s about telling today’s consumers about modern pig farming and how we care for our animals as we address their questions.”

Marti and Martha Knoblock involve their six children in pig production on their northwest Iowa farm as they look for more ways to share their story to consumers.
First-Generation Farmer Focuses on People

Keith Schoettmer – Tipton, Indiana

Schoettmer Prime Pork has grown steadily over the years surrounded by 83 acres of green fields in central Indiana. And if you’d ask the owner, first-generation farmer Keith Schoettmer, he’d attribute much of the farm’s success to his laser-like focus on people, both on and off of the farm.

Certainly, Schoettmer and his wife, Darla, have seen many changes over the years as they raised a family that’s now grown and living away from the farm. Today, they raise 22,000 pigs annually on the farrow-to-finish farm with the help of eight full-time employees.

For Schoettmer, creating the best environment for people and farm workers is a key focus. He also has made great strides in becoming a leader in the industry. From receiving the state’s Outstanding Young Pork Producer award in 1991 to serving as president of the Indiana Pork Producers Association in 2001, Schoettmer has continued to lend his voice in speaking up and serving the pork industry.

“It’s important for farmers to be involved,” said Schoettmer, who helped start the Midwest Pork Conference and chaired the event for the past 13 years.

He firmly believes that pig farmers are “animal welfare professionals” who provide the best care to pigs. Employees receive training and educational resources to ensure that the industry’s We Care™ ethical principles are followed.

“It’s important for employees to have the experience and training necessary to handle animals appropriately,” Schoettmer said. “Experience is the best trainer, so we take time to show and explain farm practices to new employees, with seasoned employees showing them the ropes.”

The America’s Pig Farmer of the Year™ program is a great avenue to share producers’ commitment to doing things right every day on their farms, he said.

“I want to help consumers understand the difference between animal welfare and animal rights,” Schoettmer said. “Some people believe that the terms are synonymous, but that’s not the case. Consumers need to know that pig farmers are the ultimate animal welfare professionals.”

He encourages employees to be a positive voice for agriculture and looks for opportunities for them to be ambassadors for the industry. Often, this starts with leading farm tours and explaining farm practices to visitors.

“Our responsibility to employees is the most important job we have,” Schoettmer said. “We invest in their lives, get to know their struggles and help in any way we can. In the end, you can’t ultimately provide the best care for the pigs if you don’t focus on people first.”

"Consumers need to know that pig farmers are the ultimate animal welfare professionals.”

Keith Schoettmer
Young Ohioan at Home as an Industry Voice

Lauren Schwab – Somerville, Ohio

Near the Indiana border in southwest Ohio, you will find Schwab Farms. Nestled among the gently rolling hills of fields and woodlands, Lauren Schwab proudly works as a second-generation farmer on the 230-acre farm founded in 1977 by her father, Jeff. For the past 12 years, Schwab has managed the farrowing house and has worked alongside her brother, Ryan, and three part-time employees.

The farrow-to-wean farm is home to 12 independent buildings that house 1,100 sows. The modern facilities provide the proper environment for the sows, which are individually cared for and observed daily to assess their needs. The sows produce about 30,000 piglets a year, which are then sold to other farmers for finishing.

“Animal care is our priority,” Schwab said. “We want to take care of people and our planet by providing a sustainable and nutritious food source, so we strive to give the best individual care and attention to each animal.”

A strong commitment to animal care and willingness to go above and beyond are Schwab’s hallmarks.

“I’ve spent countless days and nights, even sleeping in the barns, to ensure that sows and their newborn piglets are healthy and content,” Schwab said.

As a natural progression to her on-farm animal care and passion for connecting with people, Schwab said applying for America’s Pig Farmer of the Year was right on target.

“As a millennial farmer and a blogger, I connect with young adults who care about their food, our environment and their careers,” she said. “It’s up to the next generation to continue the family farm, and I want to be the driving force that helps consumers understand farm life and how their food is raised.”

Schwab is constantly looking for ways to be an industry advocate. In 2008, she was crowned the Ohio Pork Queen, and since has used her blog, “Farm Girl with Curls,” to communicate with consumers about everyday farm practices.

Working with the Pork Checkoff, Schwab is an active member of the #RealPigFarming social forces team and uses the Twitter handle, @farmgirlwcurls. Schwab also has participated in agriculture leadership programs, including the Pork Checkoff’s Operation Main Street. The experience has given her the opportunity to speak with consumers about the importance of agriculture and the pork industry.

“I want to share my experience as a farmer with consumers and further their understanding of how farmers produce food,” Schwab said. “It’s important to actively engage with consumers on a large scale and tell our story.”

Lauren Schwab uses her natural speaking ability and social media savvy to reach out to her generation and beyond about her family’s western Ohio pig farm.
Using his Niche to Promote Quality

Steve Kerns – Clearfield, Iowa

While much of life among the rolling countryside of southwest Iowa has seen little change over the past decades, Kerns Farms is an exception. In fact, owners Steve and Becky Kerns have continued to create a ripple of change by paving the way for niche pork markets on one hand and improving manure management on another.

Founded in 1966, Kerns Farms started as a 4-H project and has grown into a full-scale seedstock operation. The Kerns manage their farm with the help of their sons, Karl and Matt, as well as three employees.

They market 10,000 pigs annually, with the 320-acre farm’s facilities including hoop barns, open lots and curtain-sided and mechanically ventilated barns. The family also manages a cow-calf herd and produces corn, soybeans and hay.

As a niche producer, Kerns was a decade ahead of the boom in niche markets. Using his intuition and seeing the demand for a product that contained more marbling, Kerns began breeding Berkshire and Mangalitsa pigs. The old-line genetics resulted in a high-quality product now found throughout the United States in some high-end restaurants.

For Kerns, marketing his family’s product doesn’t stop at our country’s borders. He has worked with a variety of veterinarians, including some at Iowa State University, to create a herd-health plan that makes his genetics and breeding stock marketable internationally.

“Breeding better genetics and raising the best pork ever is an evolving art and science,” Kerns said. “Whether that is supplying genetics from our animals and artificial insemination center to producers worldwide or supplying niche market Berkshires and Mangalitsas, we continue to strive for a quality product that all consumers will appreciate.”

In 1995, Kerns Farms was among the first pig farms to construct a cultured wetlands, which is used to digest manure from their sow farm. The wetlands have one-mile of terraces on a five-acre hillside stocked with microbes to aid in manure digestion.

“This practice has reduced the need to field-apply manure and reduced odor from our farm,” Kerns said. “To survive, farmers must work alongside Mother Nature to obtain the maximum use of our resources and sustain our environment, which is part of the beauty of this system.”

“I have a passion to supply the best pork to consumers as possible,” Kerns said. “When I am producing food, I see it as a representation of every pig farmer out there, so we want to represent our products the best that we can.”

Kerns says it’s important to have meaningful conversations with consumers. He applauds programs, such as America’s Pig Farmer of the Year, that help share farm practices.
Want to Ace an Audit? Focus on Records

By Mike King

If your farm hasn’t gone through a common industry audit yet, you probably know producers who have already completed the process, which gave them a better understanding of their farm’s strengths and weaknesses and how they can make improvements. If you ask their advice on what to prepare for, the likely answer is records.

“What we’ve seen and heard from pork producers, veterinarians and others is that producers need to focus on record keeping more than other areas when it comes to an audit,” said Jamee Amundson, manager of animal welfare for the Pork Checkoff. “It’s always good to look at how you can improve record keeping in all aspects of production. The anonymous, aggregate data are showing this to be the case.”

Although it may not seem as critical to your actual on-farm practices that focus on animal welfare or pork safety, keeping proper records is critical to successfully navigating the entire audit process, Amundson said.

Following are tips to help pork producers focus on records to help ace an audit at their farm.

1. Focus on progress through better records.
   “The audit process is all about learning ways to improve the on-farm environment for pigs and the people who raise them,” Amundson said. “It’s not about attaining a certain score at any one point in time, but rather about setting benchmarks and making steady progress in all areas. Achieving this requires good records.”

2. Make sure your records are readily accessible.
   “Having quick access to documentation makes the entire audit process go more smoothly for everyone,” Amundson said. “It might take a little work upfront, but then it’s so much easier later and makes for a better workplace and environment for the people and the pigs.”

   Consider where the farm’s paperwork is stored. If some of the paperwork is kept off-site, be prepared to bring those items to the site for the auditor. Also, put some thought into electronic documentation because you may want to send records electronically to the auditor before or after the farm visit.

3. Caretaker records also should be handy.
   Be sure to have all documentation of caretakers’ certifications. This includes Pork Quality Assurance® Plus certification, Transport Quality Assurance® certification for transporters and annual training of caretakers based on their daily duties. Documentation also will be required for subsequent internal audits.

4. Establish policies and emergency plans.
   Producers need to have a written policy for zero tolerance for animal abuse, and it must be accessible by caretakers on the farm. Also needed are records of:
   • Testing emergency backup equipment
   • Site records of recorded mortalities
   • An Emergency Action Plan with phone numbers, which must be posted or available to employees in case of an emergency.

5. Use templates to develop your farm’s SOPs.
   Don’t worry if you don’t have every on-farm standard operating procedure (SOP) already in written form. SOPs
For more information about the Common Industry Audit, visit pork.org/commonaudit.

are available at pork.org/commonaudit and other places such as Iowa State University Extension. Regardless of origin, Amundson recommends that producers keep their SOPs in a three-ring binder and labeled. The auditor will ask to see them. The following list defines where most farms need preparation regarding SOPs.

- Daily observations
- Treatment management
- Caretaker training
- Animal handling procedures
- Feeding and watering animals
- Piglet processing (tail docking and castration)
- Biosecurity
- Rodent control
- Needle usage and dealing with a broken needle

Site Records Checklist

- Visitor sign-in log
- Caretaker training records
- Daily observation records kept by room/barn, including caretaker initials
- Daily observation of pigs in the treatment area
- Medication and treatment records – must contain minimum FDA-required information
- Euthanasia plan
- Annual mortality records
- Regular internal site assessments/audits
- Monthly emergency back-up equipment check
- Reporting mechanism for abuse or a written zero tolerance for abuse policy

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In the midst of a porcine respiratory and reproductive syndrome (PRRS) episode, a producer may be hard pressed to recognize the accomplishments that have been made in addressing the virus. But researchers, swine veterinarians and producers alike approach PRRS much differently today than 20 or even 10 years ago.

New Marker Found

Now, there’s a new development to add to the PRRS arsenal. As part of the PRRS Host Genetics Consortium (PHGC), supported by the Pork Checkoff, researchers have identified a genetic marker in the pig that provides improved survivability and growth in the face of a PRRS infection.

Specifically, the marker can deliver up to an 11 percent increase in weight gain, as well as a 15 percent decrease in the virus load. The responsible gene, found on chromosome 4, is guanylate binding protein 5 (GBP5).

“We discovered that the unfavorable variant does not produce the protein needed to stimulate the most effective anti-PRRS immune response,” said Joan Lunney, with USDA’s Agricultural Research Service. “This provides a precise gene target, enabling breeders to select for animals with the favorable genotype for this gene.”

By selecting for such pigs, the negative consequences of PRRS on a herd are reduced through faster clearance of the virus and sustained growth. In an endemic PRRS region, this could mean a 5 percent to 10 percent savings in feed costs through better growth and decreased morbidity.

“The amount of virus a pig sheds when infected can present more of a risk to other pigs in the area,” said Lisa Becton, DVM, Pork Checkoff’s director of swine health research and information. “So, reducing the viral load may reduce the chance of other pigs being infected.”

New Control Options

The discovery has additional value in that animal health researchers and companies can use it to identify and develop new vaccines and immunotherapies, said Bob Rowland, PHGC co-director, Kansas State University. “This is an exciting discovery that builds on previous PRRS work,” Becton said. “It’s one more step in understanding the mechanism of how PRRS affects the pig, as well as identifying ways to control the disease and reduce its impact.”

For additional perspective on the potential long-term, industry-wide impact that GBP5 could have, Lunney points to the discovery of the Halothane or stress gene and meat quality. Identifying the Halothane gene allowed breeders to eliminate it from the U.S. hog population. But, eliminating the Halothane genotype did not remove all

“We have shown that there are large genetic differences between pigs in their ability to respond to PRRS and in the impact that it has on performance. The genetic marker we have found represents one important component.”

Joan Lunney, USDA’s Agricultural Research Service

More Research Needed

As in the early days of the Halothane gene discovery, additional research is needed to determine whether selecting for GBP5 has negative consequences on other traits or on susceptibility to other diseases. Such studies are currently underway by PHGC scientists and by researchers worldwide.
Novel approaches and solutions are needed for research on PRRS biosecurity measures, vaccines, regional control, nutrition and genetics, Lunney said.

“PRRS is a disease that has put the industry at risk, especially when competing in the global market place,” Lunney said. “Therefore, corresponding nontraditional ‘high risk/high reward’ solutions are needed to battle the most complex disease in the history of modern swine production.”

Lunney said that PRRS-related genetic research needs to continue with the goal of identifying additional genes and tools that could allow producers to select for pigs that are more resistant or less susceptible to PRRS. Researchers are characterizing other DNA markers linked to improved immunity and decreased mortality from respiratory disease.

“Continuing to have additional tools and knowledge about the PRRS virus and how it infects the pig is critical to reducing its financial impact on producers,” said Becton. “Such developments also help support future efforts to eliminate the virus.” Today, GBP5 is one more tool available in that effort.

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While pork variety meats and by-products may not be popular among U.S. consumers, they are emerging as a growing opportunity to increase pork exports across the globe. Pork variety meats include pork livers, hearts, kidneys and stomachs. Products like bones, ears, tongues, tails and snouts are also popular.

“Growing populations around the world are creating a demand for pork variety meats and products that the U.S. typically considers as by-products,” said Brian Zimmerman, a pork producer from Beatrice, Nebraska and chair of the Pork Checkoff’s International Trade Committee. “Increased exports of these products are key to putting more money in U.S. pork producers’ pockets.”

The United States is the world’s largest exporter of pork muscle cuts, according to Becca Nepple, vice president of international marketing for the Pork Checkoff. “The U.S. produces more than 5 million metric tons of pork variety meats and by-products each year but exports less than half a million metric tons. There’s a great opportunity to increase exports of these products.”

A significant portion of U.S. pork carcasses are now rendered to make pet food, blood meal, bone meal and other products.

“These products are of low value in the U.S. but often are highly valued in foreign countries,” Nepple said. “In many cases, variety meat exports sell at a premium.”

Research Is a Priority

In 2013, the Checkoff International Trade Committee initiated a multi-phase research project to increase variety meat exports. To help complete the study, the Checkoff received a grant from the USDA’s Emerging Market Program.

The researchers are looking at trade restrictions and documentation requirements for variety meats in selected markets and shelf-life challenges involved in exporting chilled variety meats. The study is also focusing on emerging markets that hold promise for increased variety meat exports, with Vietnam, the Philippines, Colombia and South Africa identified by the Checkoff.

“Results from the study will provide information to help identify additional opportunities in other export markets,” Nepple said.

New Product Ideas to Help Fill Protein Needs

To help boost exports, the Pork Checkoff is working to find new uses for pork variety meat and pork by-products. Meat scientist researchers from Iowa State University, Colorado State University and North Carolina State University developed new products and presented them at a summit hosted by the Checkoff in July.

“There were some very creative ideas, especially in the area of processed meats,” Nepple said. “For example, researchers are examining a technique that allows jowl meat to be processed into a low-cost product similar to bacon, as well as a mixture of liver, kidney and heart that is ground and processed into a loaf. These items could attract a lot of interest in markets that need economically priced proteins.”

Variety meat research to help increase exports will remain a priority for the Pork Checkoff, Zimmerman said.

“The goal is to amplify our investment in export opportunities,” he said.
Protect Yourself and Pigs this Flu Season

School buses, football games and dropping temperatures also signal the return of the flu season, which can start as early as October and run as late as May. The Pork Checkoff reminds all those who have contact with pigs to get a flu vaccination to help protect the health of both pigs and people.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, people over six months of age should be immunized for influenza each year.

“Producers and swine farm workers can reduce the risk of getting sick and bringing influenza to the farm or workplace by getting vaccinated,” said Lisa Becton, D.V.M., director of swine health information and research for the Pork Checkoff.

Becton also recommends that farms modify sick-leave policies to encourage workers to stay away from the farm if they are suffering from acute respiratory infections.

“Virus shedding peaks when the clinical illness is most severe, but people may remain ‘contagious’ as long as symptoms last, which typically can be three to seven days,” she said.

At the farm level, attention to good building ventilation and good hygiene can help reduce transmission of flu viruses. Specifically, Becton said producers should make sure that curtains and fans are in working order, bird-proof their buildings and perform routine cleaning and disinfection of barns and incoming supplies.

Bolster Biosecurity

“As always, biosecurity measures should be strictly enforced,” Becton said. “It’s always important to use farm-specific clothing and footwear. Focusing on biosecurity not only can help prevent the entry of influenza, but also other diseases.”

She added, “Monitoring herd health daily and contacting the herd veterinarian immediately is very important if influenza is suspected. Rapid detection of influenza can help in timely implementation of appropriate strategies to better manage sick pigs.”

For more tips on avoiding the flu, go to pork.org/flu or cdc.gov/flu.
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