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People. Pigs. Planet.
Leading Out Loud…

As the Pork Checkoff’s newly named 2017 America’s Pig Farmer of the Year™, Leslie McCuiston spent two full days in Chicago during early October being interviewed by television, radio and digital media. With the millions of people that she reached through media outlets in just 48 hours, you’d never guess that the Columbus, Nebraska, pork producer used to shy away from the limelight.

For McCuiston, pig farming isn’t just a job – it’s a career that she is passionate about. And that enthusiasm has spilled over into welcoming every opportunity to assure consumers that pig farmers take great care to raise their animals in an ethical and transparent way.

In Chicago, McCuiston, who is a senior production manager for The Maschhoffs, took the local, regional and national stage through desk-side editorial visits, radio interviews and a satellite media tour. Media from across the country asked her about how pigs are raised and about the vital role women play today in agriculture. This included TV, radio and internet media in some of America’s largest U.S. cities, as well as everywhere from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Las Vegas, and from Wichita to Cleveland.

Joining her was Kari Underly, a third-generation Chicago butcher, author and principal of Range®, Inc., a meat marketing and education firm. The two women met with with Reuters, the Brownfield Network, Bloomberg and other media outlets. A Facebook Live session from Chicago with veteran farm broadcaster Max Armstrong and dinner with an elite group of Chicago-based food influencers, including registered dietitians, helped the pair deliver positive messages about pig farming to a wider audience.

McCuiston is always quick to point out the amazing people on her team, who focus daily on doing what’s best for the pigs in their care.

“We routinely involve veterinarians and nutritionists to ensure that what we’re doing daily fits the animals’ changing needs,” McCuiston said. “We have a great story to tell consumers, and I think it’s amazing.”

McCuiston looks forward to sharing facts about raising pigs this year as America’s Pig Farmer of the Year. And she urges all producers to get out of their comfort zones and join her in leading out loud.

– Jan Jorgensen, editor
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Business-to-Business Domestic Marketing Focus

The Pork Checkoff has been using a business-to-consumer advertising approach for over 30 years, but we are switching to a business-to-business consulting strategy in 2018. The goal? Reach more key supply chain influencers more quickly to drive more pork sales.

This is a fundamental change. Solely advertising fresh pork as a generic commodity to consumers worked in the 1980s, 1990s and even into the early 2000s, but the pork supply chain has changed dramatically since 1987.

In 1987, for example, when Pork. The Other White Meat® debuted, it was much easier to reach a broad cross-section of American consumers. Only three national TV networks existed and cable TV was in its infancy.

Not only have communication channels evolved rapidly since then – from the internet to smartphones – but rapid consolidation has also transformed the supply chain in recent years. This has been accompanied by the rise of branded pork products, such as Walmart’s Great Value® brand or Costco’s Kirkland® brand. And new players such as Amazon have entered the food business in a way that will be disruptive to existing businesses.

Shifting to a business-to-business domestic marketing strategy means we will take a more expert, consultative approach to provide our supply chain partners with market insights to help get more pork in front of consumers.

We added a new packer/processor industry relations position to regularly connect with the packers on marketing topics. We also added a full-time social responsibility position to consistently connect with senior corporate food executives on freedom to operate issues and to tell our We Care® story.

We are conducting a strategic review of the Sustainability Committee mission, designed to determine how to broaden our research and advocacy communications beyond the crucial base of environmental concerns. We want to include the broader category of social responsibility that encompasses animal well-being and the environment.

These critical changes in Domestic Marketing will empower us to share the pork industry’s social responsibility goals and success stories with key influencers in the business-to-business sector to help drive pork sales.
Consistent Eating Experience

It is surprising to note that outside of processed pork products such as bacon and ham, the average American consumes fresh pork only 6.7 times per year. This is a pathetically low number. The Pork Checkoff’s years of consumer research tell us the primary barrier to repeat purchases of fresh pork is a poor eating experience. Put simply, overcooking, low marbling and confusion on pork cut names all add up to low consumer satisfaction. But we can fix this and provide consumers with a better eating experience.

Three keys to making that happen are improving pork quality (marbling), updated pork cut names (nomenclature) and a lower recommended end-point cooking temperature (145° with a 3-minute rest). The Pork Checkoff is working across all three fronts with research, education and outreach. We also are committed to helping our channel partners continue to let consumers know about the new pork cut names and lower end-point cooking temperature.

We want consumers to look for such cuts as a Porterhouse pork chop or a ribeye pork chop, to know that it will be a consistent quality and then to get more eating enjoyment from a lower cooking temperature.

New Digital Strategy

The motto for the internet era could be, "If you can’t find it on Google in 10 seconds, it doesn’t exist.”

While the National Pork Board has been using online communications to share pork producers’ stories for years, we need to streamline and standardize our efforts and move from “me too” tactics to a comprehensive digital strategy.

Did you know the National Pork Board had 23 different websites targeted to various audiences? This old approach was cannibalizing our online search effectiveness and costing us money. But with our new digital strategy, we are reorganizing all this information into one flagship website…the revamped pork.org, which will debut in December.

Based on input from producers, consumers, retailers and others, our website is being redesigned with users in mind. We will have timely information available at people’s fingertips and build our reputation as the one-stop shop for pork information.

Our digital strategy team also will manage Pork Checkoff social media in a consistent manner to coordinate with the Pork Board’s larger strategic plan.

Evolving Secure Pork Supply Plan

On any given day, a million pigs are transported on roads across America. But what would happen to pig movement in case of a foreign animal disease (FAD) outbreak? The Pork Board, as part of the USDA’s Secure Food Supply framework, participated in the development of the Secure Pork Supply plan to answer that critical question and others. The plan will enhance communication and coordination of all pork chain segments in the event of a FAD with the goal of getting back to business as usual as quickly as possible.

To enhance the plan, the Pork Board is working with the Institute for Infectious Animal Diseases, a member of the Texas A&M University System, to build a digital “dashboard” that will give state veterinarians real-time access to select pieces of producer data needed to make a decision for allowing movements.

While participation in the plan will be voluntary and producers can control when and how the data is shared, all producers are encouraged to participate once enrollment opens.

Change is inevitable, but adaptation and survival are optional. Here at the National Pork Board, your employees are actively revamping the organization to maximize your Pork Checkoff investment and your profit potential, now and in the future.

Look for more about these four priorities in this issue.
Asian Trade Mission Offers Insights
By Kevin Waetke

With a clearer vision on how to elevate U.S. pork as the global protein of choice, National Pork Board officers and senior leaders recently returned from an Asian trade mission. Representing the Pork Checkoff, the team visited with pork processors, distributors, retailers, importers and traders in Japan and China. Asian team members of the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) accompanied the group.

“Pork is the No. 1 most consumed protein in the world, and that was certainly obvious as we toured parts of Japan and China,” said Bill Even, chief executive officer. “It is important for us to see firsthand how pork is raised, processed and promoted in Asia. The Asian customer and consumer culture is unique and we need to understand the global motivation to purchase U.S. pork.”

With the United States facing record-breaking pork production in 2017, the Checkoff is committed to growing demand, not only in the U.S., but also among top customers in Asia. In terms of pork volume, China/Hong Kong and Japan are the No. 2 and 3 export customers, with a combined volume of 534,953 metric tons (or about 1.18 billion pounds).

In terms of pork value (U.S. dollars), Japan is No. 1 and China/Hong Kong is No. 3, with a combined value of nearly $1.6 billion of exports, both according to the most recent (through July) USMEF data.

“Marketing pork comes down to building long-term relationships and having a safe, dependable, high-quality product that is presented well to the buyer,” said Pork Board President Terry O’Neel, Friend, Nebraska.

“Consumers are encouraged to experience U.S. pork through fun events and social activities,” O’Neel said. “For example, USMEF’s Gochipo (sumptuous pork) campaign extols the virtues of high-quality, delicious U.S. pork and the value of our pork products.”

Pork Board Vice President Steve Rommereim, Alcester, South Dakota, said, “China is a huge market in terms of volume and opportunity. While it is 98 percent self-sufficient in pork production, we need to extend our outreach efforts there.”

He added, “The economic growth and infrastructure development we saw in China is intimidating. This level of growth points to greater dependence on foreign market imports, with price a key buying criteria.”

O’Neel called the trade mission a great success.

“Our leadership gained a greater understanding of the Asian market by visiting with people in the Japanese and Chinese meat trade,” O’Neel said. “U.S. pork is doing well in Asia, but we can do more to improve. Free-trade issues remain both a barrier and a pathway to export growth.”

Including both muscle cuts and variety meat, U.S. pork exports have increased to 27.5 percent of total production in 2017, up from 25.6 percent last year. Developing Asian customer relationships and work with the USMEF and the National Pork Producers Council have helped make that happen.

Look for a detailed report on the Asian trade mission in the next issue of this magazine.
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Sometimes a winding path with a few detours along the way is the right route to the ultimate destination. Just ask Leslie McCuiston, a senior production manager with The Maschhoffs who was recently named America’s Pig Farmer of the YearSM. McCuiston found her fit in pig farming, where her career has flourished. Today, she’s responsible for 10 breed-to-wean farms in Nebraska and South Dakota.

“There’s nothing monotonous about pig farming, because it’s new every day,” McCuiston said. “There’s always new learning, new innovations, new challenges and new life.”

All this creates plenty of opportunities, including career openings for women. Of the nine managers McCuiston works with, six are female.

“Women are natural-born caretakers,” McCuiston said. “In my experience, the pork industry has been very accepting and welcoming of women, who are a natural fit in livestock production.”

If there’s one thing McCuiston wants people to know about pig farmers, it’s the care they take to ensure the well-being of their livestock.

“Sometimes people think that if you work with large numbers of animals, you don’t care about the pigs,” she said. “Many people at our farms refer to sows as ‘their mamas’ and piglets as ‘their babies.’ We not only care for our pigs, but we care about the people who take care of the pigs, too.”

From Cattle to Pigs
This passion for agriculture is rooted in McCuiston’s farm background. She grew up on a cattle farm in south-
west Oklahoma and had every intention of pursuing a career in the cattle industry – until she went to college.

“I started my college career by majoring in psychology so I could help others.” McCuiston said. “However, I began to miss agriculture.”

She switched her major and earned her undergraduate degree in ag economics with a minor in marketing from Oklahoma State University in 2001. After graduation, she landed a job with Cargill Pork and never looked back.

“Pig farming isn’t just a job,” McCuiston said. “It’s a career, and it’s a big part of who I am.”

For McCuiston, the best part of the day is when she’s on the farm. “I like to check in, see how things are going and get my hands dirty.”

While pig farming is her focus, McCuiston still values the semesters she spent studying psychology.

“Those classes paid off, because so much of my job involves working with people,” said McCuiston, who is a member of the Pork Checkoff’s Operation Main Street outreach program. “I’m always curious about how people make decisions, and I look for ways to connect more effectively with others.”

These skills are proving invaluable in McCuiston’s new role as America’s Pig Farmer of the Year.

“It’s so important to tell our story,” she emphasized. “If we don’t, who will?”

It requires courage and confidence to tell these stories, though. McCuiston acknowledges that these traits take time to develop.

You Aren’t that Important

“I’ve struggled with self confidence in the past,” said McCuiston, who was grateful when an acquaintance shared a priceless insight. “The concept was, ‘You aren’t that important,’ meaning other people aren’t thinking about you as much as you assume.

This perspective keeps you

“If I can share even a fraction of the excitement and passion I have for pig farming, we all win.”

– Leslie McCuiston, Columbus, Nebraska

McCuiston and Kari Underly, a pioneering Chicago master butcher, discussed everything from pork cuts to raising pigs. When McCuiston was announced as the winner in early October, Underly, who served as a judge, joined her for a media tour in Chicago.
While McCuiston used to feel nervous and uncomfortable when she walked into a room of strangers to give a speech, she’s learned to focus less on what others think of her and focus more on sharing her message. This is important as McCuiston finds new ways to connect with consumers who are far removed from agriculture.

“I want to find new, innovative ways to show others what we do in pig farming, explain how much we care and help people understand where their food comes from,” said McCuiston, who is interested in virtual tours, Facetime chats and more.

She also wants to encourage others to consider a career in pig farming.

“Our industry needs to continue to recruit people who are excited about working in pig farming,” McCuiston said. “I look forward to sharing more about the innovation and technology in modern ag as this year’s America’s Pig Farmer of the Year. It’s cool.”

Continuous improvement is what it’s all about, said McCuiston, who is honored to be this year’s winner.

“It’s exciting to see what current ag professionals and the next generation will bring to pig farming so we can do what we do better,” McCuiston said. “If I can share even a fraction of the excitement and passion I have for pig farming, we all win.”

You could be the 2018 America’s Pig Farmer of the Year. Learn how at AmericasPigFarmer.com.
For the Love of Pigs... and for the Farmers Who Raise Them

 Robin Ganzert has a confession. “I absolutely love pigs,” says Ganzert, president and CEO of American Humane, America’s oldest national humane organization. “Any chance I get to be around pigs and the people who raise them right just tickles me pink.”

That’s why judging the annual America’s Pig Farmer of the Year contest is one of the most rewarding, important and fun highlights of the year for Ganzert, who shared these insights with the Pork Checkoff Report.

Q: What motivates you to be part of the America’s Pig Farmer of the Year program?
A: It goes back to the roots of American Humane, which was founded in 1877 around the issue of farm animal welfare. In the 140 years since, we’ve been working with farmers and ranchers to improve the treatment of animals in agriculture and celebrate those who put food on our nation’s tables and raise their animals right.

To help verify good practices for all involved, American Humane created the nation’s first, largest and most trusted independent, third-party farm animal welfare program – the American Humane Certified™ program. When shoppers see the American Humane Certified seal on a product, they know the animals were raised under ethical, science-based standards.

Q: What has impressed you about the winners?
A: The winners, along with the finalists, impress me with their dedication and commitment to the humane treatment of their animals. For them, pig farming isn’t just a livelihood, but a way of life in which a tradition of respect and caring for animals is so important.

Q: What value does the program offer the pork industry?
A: It’s important to highlight the efforts of farmers who focus on providing the best care possible for their pigs, not only to reward those who do, but to encourage others to aspire to a level of meaningful care that will make a difference and create a more humane world.

Q: Why is it important for America’s pig farmers to share how they raise food?

Today, more Americans are interested in where their food comes from and how it’s raised. In a national survey conducted by American Humane, 94.9 percent said they were very concerned about farm animal welfare, and 75.7 percent said that they were very willing to pay more for humanely raised meat, dairy and eggs. When asked to rank the importance of labels, the “humanely raised” label ranked highest in importance over antibiotic-free, organic and natural.

Farmers who treat their animals with a high degree of care must take the extra step of communicating with a public that increasingly chooses to make purchases in line with its values.
Establishing Trust Is a Daily Activity

Bill Luckey – Columbus, Nebraska

When Bill Luckey says his pigs are an extension of his family, he’s not kidding. “If the electricity goes out, we check the barns and pigs before we check the house.”

This is second nature for Luckey, who runs a wean-to-finish farm in eastern Nebraska and looks for ways to bridge the gap between farmers and urban consumers.

“Less than 2 percent of the U.S. population farms, and an even smaller percentage raises livestock for meat production,” said Luckey, who also raises corn and soybeans. He markets up to 4,000 of his own pigs and 5,000 to 6,000 pigs that he custom feeds. “Raising animals comes with a great deal of responsibility.”

This includes feeding pigs properly, working with a veterinarian and providing care to maintain each pig’s health and well-being.

These principles haven’t changed from when Luckey was growing up on the family farm. The way pigs are raised is different, though, from the 50-sow operation of Luckey’s youth. Moving pigs from dirt lots into climate-controlled buildings has offered many benefits.

“Pigs are healthier because they are cleaner, and we don’t have to worry about temperature fluctuations,” said Luckey, whose farm underwent a third-party site assessment to evaluate his production practices. “Moving pig indoors has made raising pigs more fun.”

Sharing Life on a Farm

Farming is a family affair for Luckey, whose wife Nancy and sons help out. Luckey, together with son Michael and daughter-in-law Shyla, also work with the local Extension office during its annual “Life on the Farm” school enrichment program geared toward second-grade students.

The majority of the students have never been on a farm, noted Luckey. He talks about farm safety and his experiences growing up on a farm, and Michael and Shyla explain how pigs are raised.

“Students learn where their food comes from, the care that’s given to animals and the technology that’s available in agriculture,” Luckey said. “Positive feedback from teachers and students is why we’ve participated in this program for more than 20 years.”

The education opportunities don’t stop there.

“The kids share what they learn with their families, so not only are we teaching nearly 600 children, but we’re reaching the community, too,” said Luckey, who also has shared farm life with the public by giving more than 50 Operation Main Street presentations.

“Establishing trust is a daily activity,” Luckey said. “Showing how we care for our animals reassures consumers that we’re producing safe pork products.”

“It is important to reach out to the 98 percent of the U.S. population that does not farm.”
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Maria Mauer and her family want to set the gold standard when it comes to sow care, and they’re sharing their story through a public Facebook page called “The Top Sow.”

“This page provides consumers with everything they could ever want to know about raising pigs and provides encouragement to other farmers who are just beginning or who want to do better,” Mauer said.

The page includes plenty of videos showing daily activities on the Mauer family’s 800-sow farm in southeast Indiana. Mauer’s six-year-old son, Marvin, even has his own ag videos on the page.

“Thanks to technology, it’s easy to ag-vocate and show people exactly what we do,” said Mauer, who connects with people all around the world online. “You can tell people anything, but showing them is golden.”

The Mauers take pigs to the local school so Marvin can help classmates learn about pig farming. They emphasize animal-well being, which starts with sow health.

“We believe that better sows make better pigs,” Mauer said.

Pig Care Is Paramount

The pork industry’s We Care™ ethical principle that’s most meaningful to Mauer is to protect and promote animal health and well-being.

“This is the precursor to all the other ethical principles,” Mauer said.

It also helps her focus her ag-vocacy efforts.

“One person in 1,000 will ask me about food safety, but the other 999 want to know sows and pigs are well cared for,” she said.

Well-cared for sows can stay in the Mauer family’s herd a long time. Their “star sow” is 10 years old and has weaned 221 piglets.

“We focus on preventive care,” she said. “Cleanliness is important, along with ventilation, proper space and top-notch feed ingredients. We observe animals daily to see how they are doing.”

The Mauers’ veterinarian visits the farm every two weeks to walk through the barns and discuss any concerns the family has about pig health. When antibiotics are necessary, Mauer doesn’t shy away from telling consumers the truth.

“I explain where the illness, injury or infection came from, what will happen if I don’t treat it, how long I’ll treat it, what type of medication I’ll use,” Mauer said.

“Transparency is key to good consumer relationships.”

“One person in 1,000 will ask me about food safety, but the other 999 want to know pigs are well cared for.”
Leon Sheets is a tireless ball of energy when it comes to promoting pig farming, but he’s just as passionate about promoting farm safety.

“On Sept. 15, 2014, I was involved in an accident that changed my life,” said Sheets, who runs a wean-to-finish pig farm in northeast Iowa. “I was in my barn to do a quick rinse to prepare for pressure washing. Minutes after starting, I found myself engulfed in an explosion and fireball.”

After recovering from severe burns, Sheets began promoting safety precautions for power washing and pumping manure.

“Not only are these protocols important for humans, but pigs are often at the scene and need to be protected, too,” he said.

This focus on pigs’ safety and well-being has long defined Sheets, who markets about 33,000 pigs per year. He isn’t shy about speaking up for the pork industry, whether he’s presenting to local high school culinary classes or promoting U.S. pork on trade mission trips overseas.

**Making Connections**

“Pig farmers do care,” he emphasized. “We need to connect with consumers so they know that we care for our pigs, our farms and our communities.”

Sheets has shared this message in countless media interviews and more than 40 presentations through the Pork Checkoff’s Operation Main Street program. He explains why pig farming has changed through the years and how this benefits the animals, starting with climate-controlled barns.

“From the time a pig arrives on my farm until it leaves, we try to provide a warm, clean, dry, draft-free environment,” he noted.

Then Sheets explains how more emphasis on proper pig handling and health protocols results in less stress for pigs and people.

“I believe pigs today have a more comfortable living area and a better chance at survival with less environmental pressure and less handling stress,” he said.

Sheets’ employees are required to be certified in Pork Quality Assurance® Plus and Transport Quality Assurance® to ensure pigs’ safety and well-being. Sheets works closely with his veterinarian to keep his pigs healthy.

“Sheets is No. 1 on our farm,” Sheets said. “Producing pork is what we do and who we are.”

Giving back to the community is equally important.

“I strive to lead and encourage the next generation, plus I learn from them,” said Sheets, a past president of the Iowa Pork Producers Association who has served as the Chickasaw County livestock judging coach. “It’s rewarding to watch these kids grow and assume leadership roles in the community and the ag industry.”

Leon Sheets and his wife Barb put the safety of pigs and people first on their Iowa farm.
Surprising New Audiences
2016 America’s Pig Farmer of the YearSM shares facts about pork
By Darcy Maulsby

A

s he walked across the Stanford University campus in December, apprehension accompanied Brad Greenway. Sharing pork’s story is second nature to the 2016 America’s Pig Farmer of the YearSM, but his meeting with the university’s food service directors seemed daunting – at first.

“I was surprised by how interested they were in what we do on the farm,” said Greenway, who farms with his wife, Peggy, near Mitchell, South Dakota. “They asked awesome questions and made comments such as, ‘I had no idea about all the technology you use to keep pigs comfortable.’”

The productive, four-hour meeting turned into much more, Greenway noted. “Stanford’s foodservice directors wanted to continue the conversation and invited me back that evening to share more information,” said Greenway, whose comments were incorporated into the food blog “I Am the First Bite” written by a Stanford employee. “Now is our chance to become a trusted resource for people who are seeking answers.”

The element of surprise works to pig farmers’ advantage, said Greenway, who has been influencing food conversations in some unlikely venues and through media interviews. His past year as America’s Pig Farmer of the Year, as well as chair of the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance, has included:

• Media tours. “Fast and furious” is how Greenway described the non-stop media interviews he participated in last fall when he was named America’s Pig Farmer of the YearSM.

There’s a lot of talk these days about sharing ag’s story, but that’s a job best left to the professionals, right? Not so, says the 2016 America’s Pig Farmer of the YearSM.

“I wish every farmer could have the experiences I’ve had as America’s Pig Farmer of the Year,” said Brad Greenway, who has spoken to people around the globe. “It’s useful to hear what consumers are thinking and share your story with them.”

But you don’t need to be named America’s Pig Farmer of the Year to make this happen, added Greenway, who sets the record straight on three common myths producers may have about reaching out to the public.

**Myth:** People have already made up their minds and don’t care what I have to say.

**Fact:** As discussed above, Greenway shattered this myth when he visited Stanford University. The group, Peta2, which describes itself as the world’s largest youth animal rights group, has called Stanford the “Favorite Vegan-Friendly Large College.” However, its top foodservice professionals were receptive when Greenway shared farm images to show how he raises pigs.

“Pictures and videos go a long way toward building understanding,” Greenway said. “Continuing the conversation is key to changing people’s perceptions of pig farming. If we’re not out there telling our story, who will?”
the Year. Not only did he do in-person interviews around Chicago, where the event was held, but he participated in 29 TV and radio interviews nationwide.

“Media opportunities have shown me that people are interested in agriculture,” Greenway said. “Consumers want to know someone is taking care of our animals daily and doing the right thing.”

• The Consumer Electronics Show. “Technology and agriculture go hand in hand, from crop production to robotic milking to pig farming,” said Greenway, who noted that the show attracted 175,000 people.

At the event, Greenway helped roll out 360-degree virtual reality videos that were filmed on Illinois pork producer Phil Borgic’s pig farm.

“This was a unique opportunity to share agriculture’s story with a new audience,” he said.

• Sustainable Ag Summit. Animal activists, food buyers for Dunkin’ Donuts and other audience members attended the summit in Atlanta, where Greenway participated in a panel with a Smithfield Foods representative.

“‘We explained what pig farmers are doing to be more sustainable,’” said Greenway, who addressed manure management and more efficient electrical use on the farm.

• Facebook Live. Social media, including Facebook Live, allow Greenway to show daily life on his farm.

“I’m in my comfort zone in the barn,” said Greenway, who demonstrated the climate-control system during a recent Facebook Live broadcast. Views of the animals generated the most response, he added.

• Facetime. The video chat system allowed Greenway to remain on his farm while interacting with Iowa State University students in a Contemporary Ag Issues class.

“I talked with 175 students in 10 minutes, which is pretty efficient,” he noted. “While technology is powerful, nothing beats one-to-one conversations.”

He added, “It’s something I encourage everyone to do. It can be as simple as talking to your neighbor. People are interested in food, so we need to have these conversations.”

Myth: People not well versed in pig farming are not interested in facts.

Fact: Some key audiences, such as registered dietitians, speak the language of science. Whether on a panel at the Future Food-Tech summit in San Francisco or at an animal welfare conference in Vienna, Austria, Greenway shared facts about pig farming and personal stories.

“Some dietitians, for example, are key influencers with 20 million online followers. When you share facts about hot-button issues, such as animal well-being or antibiotic use, plus convey your passion for raising pigs, you become a credible source.”

Fact: Greenway had never used Twitter or Facebook Live before becoming America’s Pig Farmer of the Year, but he learned how to use the tools – and it was easier than he expected.

“I used Facebook Live from our farm to talk to meat buyers at Costco’s headquarters in Washington state,” Greenway said. “It was great, because they could see inside our barn and ask questions.”

Greenway hosted four Facebook Live events on the #RealPigFarming page this year, with over 35,000 views.
Setting the Record Straight
Operation Main Street outreach targets more high-level Influencers
By Darcy Maulsby and Jan Jorgensen

What about GMO corn and pigs? Why do pig farmers use antibiotics? What happens to manure? What if you had to answer tough questions like these? That is exactly the kind of challenge the Pork Checkoff’s Operation Main Street (OMS) volunteer speakers do not shy away from. In fact, OMS speakers – from pig farmers to veterinarians – actively seek new audiences, including key influencers such as dietitians, chefs, grocery associations and nurses.

In July 2017, Steve Brier took the pork industry’s message to one of the Pork Checkoff’s top targets to build pork demand – grocers and wholesalers. The Nevada, Missouri, pig farmer was a featured speaker during the Missouri Grocers Association Showcase and annual meeting, which included representatives from national wholesale groups and leading supermarket chains.

“This was the best OMS audience ever for me in terms of impacting pork sales,” said Brier, an OMS speaker since 2005 who has given 64 presentations. In his presentation, Powering Meatcase Profits, The Pork Partnership, Brier demonstrated how pig farmers are building consumer trust and increasing satisfaction with pork. The program offered a unique learning environment where attendees asked about:

- Antibiotics
- Grass-fed pork
- Hormones
- Heritage breeds

His remarks paid off, with the meeting organizer sending a note of appreciation: “Thank you so much for speaking. My colleagues were very impressed. Who knew you can cook pork just like a steak with a little pink in the middle?”

More Speakers, More Training, More Audiences
Success stories like this highlight the power of OMS, which keeps expanding to more speakers, more training and more audiences.

“We’re continually impressed with speakers’ drive to find new ways to make an even bigger impact and address top pork industry priorities,” said Ernie Barnes, director of producer services for the Checkoff.

Launched in 2004, OMS is a volunteer-driven program that has evolved into a national (48 states) outreach effort to share the pork industry’s story. The program also has also evolved from reaching local civic groups to expanding to high-priority influencers, including dietitians, chefs, grocery associations and nurses.

Get Involved… The Checkoff is always looking for OMS speakers, especially on the coasts and in the Southeast and Southwest. For details, call: (800) 456-7675

*Based on an analysis of 55,761 OMS audience evaluations through July 2017.
tians, nurses, veterinarians, medical professionals, chefs, grocers and wholesalers.

In 2017, almost 50 presentations had been scheduled to audiences of high-level influencers. They in turn share what they learn with their audiences, such as patients, clients and customers.

“These audiences are hungry for pork information, and OMS speakers are eager to oblige,” Barnes said. “From the start, we’ve been thoroughly impressed with the willingness of farmers and veterinarians to volunteer time to OMS.”

He noted that 83 percent of OMS speakers live in the top 12 pork-producing states, but only 23 percent of the U.S. population resides there.

“OMS speakers are dedicated to reaching beyond their communities to share pork’s story.”

50% Reach to Influencers

Since 2010, OMS audiences have shifted toward current and future decision-makers.

Dietitian Outreach? Most Definitely.

That’s how OMS speakers responded when the possibility of reaching out to dietitians was broached. These nutrition professionals have proven to be ready audience when it comes to learning more about how pigs are raised today.

Over the last six years, OMS volunteers have given presentations to more than 250 dietitian groups primarily in pork-producing states. However, OMS speakers are now taking their message coast to coast.

“Dietitians are concerned about the quality of their food,” said Mary Kelpinski, an OMS speaker from East Lansing, Michigan. “The amount of care farmers give to their animals surprises them, but they get it quickly.”

There are many questions about how animals are raised, including about antibiotic use, said OMS speaker Karen Richter, an OMS speaker and Montgomery, Minnesota, pig farmer. “But dietitians are surprised and receptive to correct information, such as the fact that pork is hormone-free,” Richter said.

Hearing Directly from Farmers who Raise Pork Resonates

To connect with any audience, from dietitians to nurse practitioners to grocers, OMS speakers agree that the key is simple – tell your farm story.

“Explain how you do things, what your farm looks like and how pigs are treated,” said Jeff Harker, DVM, an OMS speaker from Frankfort, Indiana. “Audiences like hearing personal stories about raising pigs.”

Operation Main Street by the Numbers

More than 1,300 trained OMS speakers, including 121 veterinarians, in 48 states

Speakers have reached consumers, dietitians, high school and college students, veterinary audiences and other groups

More than 240,000 people heard firsthand about today’s pork production

Media coverage reached more than 36 million consumers
Revealed: Secret Lives of Pig Farmers
Videos share human-interest stories to connect consumers with pig farmers
By Darcy Maulsby

While urban consumers enjoy bacon, pork chops and other pork products, most have never met a pig farmer. Earlier this year, the Pork Checkoff launched a new video series to remedy that. The Secret Lives of Pig Farmers videos can be found on the Checkoff’s #RealPigFarming YouTube channel.

“Consumers are not only asking about how pork they buy is raised, but they also want to know about the farmers who produce the food they serve their families,” said Claire Masker, director of public relations for the Checkoff. “These videos share powerful human-interest stories that connect consumers with America’s pig farmers.”

Take Walter Marm, the subject of the first Secret Lives of Pig Farmers video. This Medal of Honor recipient’s remarkable story began far from the farm on a mountain in Vietnam in the 1960s.

“I was in the first major battle of the Vietnam War,” said Marm, a U.S. Army veteran who raises pigs today with his family near Fremont, North Carolina. “For awhile we thought we were in another Little Big Horn – surrounded and outnumbered.”

He served with the 7th Cavalry at Chu Pong Mountain, where a unit from another company was trapped.

“We made two attempts to get to that platoon, but we were stopped by intense fire,” Marm said. “I told my men, ‘Hold your fire!’ and ran across 30 meters of open terrain so I could get into position and throw a grenade over the top.”

As Marm prepared to lead his men to rescue the platoon, shots rang out and a bullet shattered his jaw. He was later evacuated by a helicopter delivering more ammunition to the U.S. Army troops.

Marm received the Medal of Honor on Dec. 19, 1966.

“Serving our country is very important,” said Marm, who got involved in raising pigs after 30-plus years in the military. “Learning to farm made me appreciate the hard work farmers do. The farming community is just like the military – it’s something Americans need.”

Other pig farmers featured in the series include Iowa’s champion baker Cristen Clark, runner and Olympic medal winner Clayton Murphy, who grew up on an Ohio pig farm, and North Carolina’s Henry Moore.
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More than 2.3 billion active social media accounts are being used across the globe, according to Brandwatch.com. A lot of people are having conversations online, and some of those people want to learn more about what happens on today’s pig farms.

The Pork Checkoff’s social media outreach program, #RealPigFarming, helps pig farmers, veterinarians, academics, youth and allied industry members share stories about today’s pig farming. The hashtag (#) is how people can search social media posts with the same phrase.

“Telling the story of #RealPigFarming through social networks brings consumers and the pork industry together in a way not possible just a few years ago,” said Jarrod Bakker, a pig farmer from Dike, Iowa, who posts about his farm on social media. “Through images and videos, we can tell our story many different ways.”

Since the start of the Checkoff’s social media program in mid-2014, nearly 60,000 positive posts have used #RealPigFarming.

Bakker encourages everyone involved in the pork industry to join the conversation.

“I’ve enjoyed sharing my #RealPigFarming story online,” Bakker said. “I’ve made connections and had real conversations about what goes on in barns today, and that is important for the future of the pork industry.

5 Tips on How to Get Started

Join the conversation by sharing your #RealPigFarming story online. Here are five tips from the Pork Checkoff.

1. **Start with one social media platform.**
   With so many choices, sharing your story online can quickly become overwhelming. Pick one platform and get comfortable sharing your #RealPigFarming story on that channel. Once you’ve mastered that, you can add new platforms if you want.

2. **Have a conversation.**
   People trust another person more than facts. To get people to trust you, they need to know who you are by having a conversation with you. Learn who they are and what food production concerns they have. Get to know them by listening to them, and then share your #RealPigFarming story with them.

3. **A photo is worth a thousand words.**
   Photos and videos from your farms virtually open the barn doors on social media. It is not always possible to host farm tours in every barn, but good photos and videos from your farm can show consumers how pigs are raised and what farm life looks like.

4. **Think before you post.**
   People without a pig farming background might not always understand standard industry practices, so sometimes a well-intentioned post could have negative consequences. Think before you post. For example, dry off a newly born piglet before posting a selfie of you holding it. And if you see a post from someone that could be misinterpreted by someone outside the industry, let them know.

5. **Stay above the fray.**
   When someone online says something negative about the pork industry, it can be hard not to take it as a personal attack. If that happens, state what you know to be true and then kindly excuse yourself from the conversation. You might not be able to change someone’s mind, but other people are watching how you react to the post. If you remain positive, those watching are more likely to trust what you say rather than the negative posts.
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Farm Tours Create Ripple Effect
Dietitians, bloggers learn about raising pigs to share with their audiences
By Claire Masker

Animal care, environmental sustainability and responsible antibiotic use are all questions consumers have about today’s pork production. To help answer these questions, the Pork Checkoff has been inviting influencers onto farms across the country.

“During the past few years, we have taken the critical step of building consumer trust by offering farm tours to reach influencers,” said Steve Rommereim, vice president of the National Pork Board and a pork producer from Alcester, South Dakota.

“Sharing our farm story with influencers creates a ripple effect as they reach out to their consumer audiences with our messages,” Rommereim said. “Consumers trust influencers, such as registered dietitians and food bloggers.”

This year, five farms and the Checkoff offered a glimpse of life on a pig farm to more than 60 key influencers, including national journalists, registered dietitians and food bloggers. In addition to the Checkoff, hosts were Smithfield Hog Production, Missouri; Iowa Select Farms; Rommereim Farms, South Dakota; South Dakota State University; Wakefield Pork, Minnesota; and Pipestone Veterinary Services, Minnesota.

Science Matters
Nearly 30 influential registered dietitians participated in three of the farm tours this year, including one held with Midwest Dairy in Minnesota during September.

“The science of raising pigs helps us connect with this audience,” said Adria Huseth, who is a registered dietitian and manager of nutrition communications and research for the Checkoff.

“When I joined the Pork Checkoff team, the majority of my conversations with health professionals involved the nutrient profile of pork and how it fits into a healthy lifestyle,” Huseth said. “But the conversation has shifted in the last couple of years to include discussions focused on pork production, animal well-being and sustainability.”

Lincoln Langhorst, owner of Wakefield Pork which...
hosted the registered dietitian tour in September, says that opening up farms to dietitians is a win-win.

“Targeting registered dietitians is important because their clients are asking them questions about how food is raised,” Langhorst said.

According to Huseth, a survey is sent to each registered dietitian before and after a farm tour. Results of one are shown on page 26.

“We've seen an increase in how confident these influencers are in talking about pork production with their consumers,” said Huseth.

Farm-to-Fork Tour Resonates with Bloggers

For the third year, the Pass The Pork Tour showed food bloggers what it takes to raise pigs today, from insemination on a sow farm to learning about pigs rations made at an on-farm feed mill. The bloggers on this year’s tour reached nearly 14 million people with their online followers.

“Bloggers play a vital role in connecting consumers with their food and the farmers who raise it,” said Kevin Waetke, vice president of strategic communications for the Checkoff.

“Providing these individuals with access to experts through an on-farm experience offers context and access to accurate information for their readers.”

The bloggers also participated in a pork fabrication demonstration and a cooking experience that showcased the versatility of pork across the menu.

“I'm excited to share with my readers what I learned on the farm and the care and thought that goes into raising these animals for food,” said Lynne Feifer, who is from Phoenix and blogs at 365 Days of Baking and More.

“I'm also excited to share with them all of the different ways that they can prepare pork for their families.”

In May, registered dietitians participated in a farm tour in Missouri where they learned about environmental sustainability.
Understanding Today’s Pork Demand Landscape

Checkoff repositions its marketing approach to reach a changing market

By Kevin Waetke

It’s no secret that the U.S. protein industry is in expansion mode. With pork production expected to be up more than 12 percent in 2017, Pork Checkoff staff and leadership spent the summer defining today’s pork demand “landscape.”

What motivates people to buy pork? What barriers are in play to prevent them from doing so? Step one is attaining more market intelligence through research.

“Previous Checkoff intelligence was an inch wide and a mile deep,” said Jarrod Sutton, vice president of domestic marketing. “That’s not enough today.”

He added, “We can no longer focus research on simple demographics. We need to fully understand what motivates people to purchase pork and share that with our retail and foodservice partners.”

In June, the Checkoff announced a marketing strategy shift from 30 years of business-to-consumer advertising to a business-to-business consulting model. This called for a foundation of research on the growing millennial and multicultural audiences, who share a drive to stay connected and to seek information through digital communications.

“Once initial research is complete, we will have an in-depth understanding of pork consumers and opportunities for growth,” said Patrick Fleming, director of market intelligence for the Checkoff.

“That means exploring demand for fresh and processed pork both at home and out-of-home,” Fleming said. “We will share insights with our packer, processor, retail and foodservice partners to inform and inspire their business strategies.”

A snapshot of how pork is sold shows that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all marketing approach. Extensive research is helping the Pork Checkoff reposition pork for a changing audience.

“We need to know the who, what where, when, why and how of pork consumption. Only then can we grow pork demand in the years ahead.”

– Patrick Fleming, Pork Checkoff

GROWING DEMAND
How to Define the “Demandscape”

Pork has grown well beyond its former role as a generic commodity in need of marketing. With the diversity of cuts and sales opportunities in both retail (such as point-of-sale promotion) and foodservice (such as a featured menu item), reshaping the marketing strategy has never been more critical. But where do you begin? The following rules of the road are guiding the Pork Checkoff down its new path:

Provide perspective. The Checkoff must identify how food industry trends impact pork demand by balancing questions specific to pork with questions about the larger market context and priorities. How do shoppers choose pork from other competing proteins? How is e-commerce changing grocery-buying habits? What about the emerging role of meal kits?

Be credible. Pork producers must demonstrate sound production practices and be transparent. Research results may reveal good, as well as bad, news for pork in the context of market trends and consumer preferences.

Mine new data for insight. The Checkoff needs to understand pork’s stakeholder targets and priorities. For example, many retail and foodservice partners may wish to identify their own audience segments within the dataset.

Correlate the data. The Checkoff must provide insight on connections between and among pork consumer values, preferences, perceptions and consumption behavior.

Qualitative and quantitative input. Exploratory opinion research will delve into consumer trends and perceptions. The Checkoff needs to apply subjective information to ensure trends are accurately reflected in future quantitative studies.

Actionable audience segmentation. Research will clearly define audience segments that allow the Checkoff’s partners to see market growth opportunities that match demand with available product.

How Is Pork Purchased?
Part of the demand landscape is understanding how pork is sold.
“Retail pork sales volume is about 70 percent fresh and 30 percent processed,” Fleming said. “Yet in foodservice – which for the first time surpassed retail pork sales by volume – it is the reverse, with 30 percent fresh and 70 percent processed.”

He added, “Clearly, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all marketing approach. Throw in growing exports, and the challenges are magnified.”

In the United States, millennials have surpassed baby boomers in both volume of purchases and cumulative buying power. This generational shift influences more than sales because millennials view their purchases as a reflection of their values, beliefs and behaviors.

“Millennials also have higher expectations about understanding where their food comes from and how it is grown and processed,” Sutton said. “Transparency, authenticity, health and the long-term sustainability of food production is key.”

Shifting in Marketing
The pork supply chain is now highly consolidated, with just seven major food companies influencing the distribution of 90 percent of the pork procured. Companies that a generation ago

Continued on page 30
Top 10 Food Trends

Many of today’s food trends involve the expectation of simplicity, authenticity, transparency and personalization. Here are top trends identified by the Pork Checkoff that impact the pork industry.

1. **An experience that matters.** Food values have evolved from “food as fuel” to “food as an experience.”

2. **Societal wellness.** A new food culture connects consumer demand to ethical, responsible, values-driven food production.

3. **Transparency.** There has been an ongoing evolution of thought from “What’s in it?” to “Where is it from?” to “How were people and animals treated?” to “How and why is it packaged?” To meet this need, farmers willing to share their on-farm story can become the next celebrity chefs and rock stars.

4. **Supply chain needs.** There has been a 72 percent increase in environment-related claims and a 45 percent increase in animal welfare claims from 2011 to 2015. The demand for total transparency incorporates the entire food chain.

5. **Changing nutrition priorities.** From avoiding “bad” food to adding “good” food choices to eating food as it “was meant to be,” today’s consumers seek clean, simple, “real” food.

6. **Replacing red meat.** Plant proteins and meat alternatives are being used to attempt to replace red meat.

7. **Personalization.** Consumers are following a wide variety of diets that they feel meet their individual needs.

8. **Fast-paced consumer lifestyles.** The demand for smaller meals, more snacks and on-the-go options is growing.

9. **Millennial influence over Baby Boomer eating habits.** Historically, the most likely pork consumers are the aging Baby Boomer generation. But Boomers now look more like millennials in their purchase and consumption habits.

10. **Niche industry growth.** Call it entitlement, but consumers want what they want, when they want it – more retail stores, more fine dining and more fast-dining options.

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Continued from page 29

served as middlemen to the marketing process now have prominent brands and are much better positioned to directly connect with consumers and pork enthusiasts.

**Start with What You Know (and What You Don’t)**

“This fall, the Checkoff will select a strategic research partner to complete a comprehensive demand assessment,” Fleming said. “We need to know the who, what, where, when, why and how’ of pork consumption. Only then can we grow pork demand in the years ahead.”

Toward that end, the Domestic Marketing team work starts with a challenge to identify, define, and clarify the best pork target audiences for both in-home and out-of-home consumption. This also will entail identifying unique growth opportunities and ideal pork products for foodservice and retail, as well as providing new insights into messages that will make consumers more loyal to pork.

“We will only be successful if we provide our customers with a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the pork consumer and opportunities for market growth,” said Sutton. “We cannot do it all at once, but there’s a lot of runway ahead. We can build long-term relationships by providing research that illuminates opportunities and guides strategies.”

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Hungry? Think Yummly!
Checkoff teams with online innovator in personalized recipes

The Pork Checkoff is putting a new twist on sharing pork meal ideas with consumers through a unique recipe partnership with Yummly that will launch in December. The move is part of Checkoff efforts to upgrade its digital footprint.

What Is Yummly?
“Yummly is a smart phone application that connects the right cook, with the right food and recipes, at the right time,” said Jarrod Sutton, vice president of domestic marketing for the Pork Checkoff.

Founded in 2010, Yummly is a leading innovator in personalized recipes and meal solutions.

The change in how the Checkoff manages its pork recipes is an opportunity to build a relationship with an industry leader in recipe development, aggregation and distribution, Sutton said.

Sharing Pork Recipes with 22 Million Users
“This partnership is a win-win. It will streamline how the Pork Checkoff promotes and distributes recipes while improving the user experience for consumers,” Sutton said. “Most important, the Pork Checkoff’s more than 2,100 recipes will find a home in front of the eyes of Yummly’s 22 million users.”

Smartphone apps such as Yummly are precisely how today’s cooks seek information, according to Kevin Waetke, vice president of strategic communications for the Pork Board.

“We need pork recipe ideas to be at consumers’ fingertips to keep pork top of mind,” Waetke said. “Our strategy fits Yummly’s driving goal to answer the question ‘What’s for dinner?’ before cooks even know they’re hungry.”

Yummly’s users also are devoted followers that use technology to drive food purchases – and they drive traffic to food blogger sites.

“IT all starts with searching the app for a recipe, finding the ideal recipe and generating a list of needed foodstuffs to purchase,” he said. “In the long term, we will even have a platform to educate pork consumers about three key issues – quality, pork cut names and the cooking temps.”

The Yummly site will use pork-branded pages to share and distribute pork recipes from all sites, including Google searches, state websites and the Checkoff’s pork.org. Look for the transition to the Yummly app in early December with the launch of the newly designed pork.org.

Opportunities
- Reach 22 million active Yummly users
- Mobile app fits on-the-go lifestyles
- Smart Kitchens use Yummly app
- App generates a grocery list to make it easy
- Cross promotions with other foods will help keep pork top of mind with consumers
U.S. pork producers understand that to sell more pork, they must meet consumer demands for more consistent, high-quality products. Consumers base pork purchases on quality as defined by color, packaging and expiration date, and they will purchase pork repeatedly if their eating experience is consistent.

For the National Pork Board, 2017 has been a year where individual pieces of the puzzle to improve consumers’ overall pork eating experience have come together. Quality, new pork cuts nomenclature and a recommended lower endpoint cooking temperature are the keys to giving the U.S. pork industry needed momentum to boost domestic and international demand.

While all of the three paths to increase pork demand are important, consistency appears to hold the strongest case for moving the demand needle upward.

Renewed Focus on Quality
“The National Pork Board has been involved with producer-led meat-quality projects and initiatives for more than 25 years,” said National Pork Board President Terry O’Neel, Friend, Nebraska. “Our objective has always been to create more value to all segments of the pork chain by producing a better, more consistent product for all consumers.”

The emphasis on quality isn’t a new one for members of the Pork Checkoff’s Pork Quality Initiative Task Force. The producers, packers and academics in the group agree that the path forward must take several routes based on Checkoff-funded research.

The results show that consumers base pork purchases on pork color, packaging and expiration date. This is apart from the consumer taste and preference study that found shear force (measure of tenderness) and pH to be the two biggest contributors to eating quality.

As Sam’s Club’s national pork buyer, Brian Gripe understands the complexity of what drives food purchases. “Consumers start by looking at freshness and then may choose product attributes such as all-natural, etc.,” Gripe said. “From there they may select pork

Pork’s 3 Keys to Building Consistency
Quality, nomenclature and cooking temperature play critical roles in meeting consumer expectations

By Mike King

Loin Chops Scoring Below 3
As part of its 2020 strategic plan, the National Pork Board set a quality goal of reducing pork loin chops that score below the board’s color score of “3” compared with the 2012 retail baseline study of 55 percent.
based on visual product attributes such as thinner cuts with less fat trim versus thicker cuts with more fat trim. They also may select pork of lighter color versus darker color.”

Regardless of their selection criteria, Gripe says it boils down to consistency. “If we can take out variation within pork cuts at the meatcase and provide products that result in positive eating experiences, it will drive repeat purchases,” Gripe said.

What’s in a Name?

Terms such as “Porterhouse pork chops” went from an aspiration to reality in 2015 with their appearance in the eighth edition of The Meat Buyer’s Guide®. This represented a breakthrough achievement for the North American meat trade.

Stephen Gerike and Patrick Fleming, both part of the Pork Checkoff’s Domestic Marketing team, played major roles in persuading the meat industry to literally rewrite its book on standard pork names. The goal was to use more common names that consumers were already familiar with.

“With this change, specifically with Porterhouse pork chops, ribeye pork chops and New York pork chops, we’re seeing a change in the way retailers and restaurants talk about meat,” Gerike said. “Instead of featuring ‘assorted pork chop’ packages in the meatcase, retailers can promote specific pork cuts to help drive demand and add value to loin chops.”

O’Neel says the new nomenclature is a key step. “The old names were confusing to consumers,” O’Neel said. “That’s why we wanted to choose new cut names to enhance the value of pork cuts.”

The Meat Buyer’s Guide, published by the North American Meat Institute, is the universal meat cut reference for the United States, Canada and Mexico and is endorsed by 33 industry and foodservice associations.

Continued on page 34
The publication is the premier resource for foodservice professionals.

“It’s an ongoing education process, but we’re pleased to see large restaurant chains such as Outback use the new pork nomenclature in their menus,” Gerike said.

He added, “We want people to talk about a pork Porterhouse chop (formerly a bone-in pork loin) and relate it to a Porterhouse steak. This reinforces that the cut is good for grilling and is tender and high quality.”

Lower Temp to Boost Eating Experience

The National Pork Board got another tool in its quest to improve pork quality and eating consistency in 2011. That is when USDA approved a new recommended cooking temperature of 145°F, with a 3-minute rest.

The breakthrough was important because Checkoff consumer research consistently showed that Americans tend to overcook common pork cuts, resulting in a less-than-optimal eating experience. The revised recommendation applies to pork whole-muscle cuts, such as loin, chops and roasts. Consumers should still cook ground meat, such as ground pork, to 160°F.

The 145-degree recommendation stemmed from a 2007 Checkoff-funded research project conducted by Ohio State University to measure consumer eating preferences. As part of the project, the researchers tested how various end-cooking temperatures affected eating preferences. Of course, they needed to know if temperatures below 160°F would be safe if preferred by consumers.

“We sought this goal for years,” O’Neel said. “Research showed that U.S. pork could be consumed safely when cooked to an internal temperature of 145°F, followed by a 3-minute rest, so it was simply a matter of reviewing the science.”

However, old cooking habits often take years to change. That fact isn’t lost on the National Pork Board, but O’Neel claims that it won’t deter industry efforts.

“Consumers can enjoy pork cooked to a variety of temperatures, but 145°F is now proven as a safe choice,” he said. “And it provides more consistent pork that’s flavorful, juicy and safe. That’s why we are committed to helping our food-chain partners communicate this innovation to consumers.”

In the end, all paths to improve pork quality must lead to products that domestic and international customers want.

“By improving pork quality you improve the eating experience for pork,” said Gripe of Sam’s Club. “When consumers have positive experiences with pork they want to recreate those memorable experiences. This leads to increased demand and creates shared value throughout the pork supply chain by increasing margins for producers, packers and retailers.”

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<tr>
<th>Temperature</th>
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<tr>
<td>160°F</td>
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<tr>
<td>150-160°F</td>
<td>9-11 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>145-150°F (recommended)</td>
<td>8-9 minutes</td>
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Chops, steaks and roasts are best enjoyed at an internal cooking temperature of 145°F with a 3-minute rest.

Grilling times are based on a three-fourths to one-inch thick pork chop, turning once halfway through, and letting rest for 3 minutes.
USDA Proposes Revisions to Its Pork Grade Standard

By Mike King

Recently, the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) notified the National Pork Board that it was in the process of making proposed revisions to its over 30-year-old voluntary pork-grade standard. This move, if approved after a public comment period, could provide the pork chain with the option of using a new voluntary tool to help improve overall pork quality.

AMS’ current voluntary pork-grade standard has been in place since 1985 and according to Steve Larsen, assistant vice president of science and technology for the Pork Checkoff, it’s no longer able to accurately assess quality attributes.

“This is especially true with the color of pork demanded by today’s consumer,” Larsen said. “The current standard from AMS only measures lean yield percentage, belly thickness and a combination of backfat thickness and muscle score.”

“Adopting some of these technologies should offer the pork chain much-needed metrics to help achieve better, more consistent pork for consumers.”

The National Pork Board has been involved with producer-led meat quality projects and initiatives for more than 25 years. The unchanging goal has been to create more value for all segments of the pork chain by producing a better product for consumers.

“We can certainly see the success that other meat industries have had when they used quality-related programs,” Larsen said. “It helps send important signals to encourage production of higher quality products, which is what we want to do.”

He added, “In the end, it’s about achieving improved and consistent pork quality that creates increased demand for U.S. pork.”

Looking Ahead

USDA/AMS has recently proposed a new voluntary pork grading standard. You can find detailed information about the agency proposal by reviewing what was published in the Federal Register.

“Checkoff-funded research has found that various technologies can be used to predict color, marbling, pH and tenderness,” Larsen said.
Will 2017’s Key Trends Continue?
By Steve Meyer

The USDA's September quarterly Hogs and Pigs Report confirmed continued but moderate growth for the U.S. pork production sector. Along with confirming this trend, the report also solidified three others that have shaped the pork industry in 2017. Whether these trends continue and to what degree will determine producer success in 2018 and beyond.

Trend One: Steady but Moderate Growth
The USDA report indicates that U.S. production capabilities continue to grow at a moderate pace. The key national data appear in the chart below. Year-on-year growth for every key inventory and productivity metric has become the norm in these reports, and September was no exception.

The breeding herd was the largest since June 2008, but just 1.2 percent larger than a year ago. Market hog inventories grew by a healthy, but not large, 2.6 percent from a year ago. Farrowings and litter sizes continued to grow at a pace that suggests higher productivity of the U.S. herd.

Virtually every item in the hog inventory report has set records in 2017. Look for those records to be broken again when USDA's December report is published.

This growth has been accompanied by unprecedented growth of the pork packing sector over the past 12 months.
- MoonRidge Pork in Pleasant Hope, Missouri, (target capacity of 2,500 head per day) opened last year.
- Prime Pork in Windom, Minnesota, (5,100 head per day) opened in late April.
- Triumph-Seaboard's Sioux City, Iowa, plant (10,200 head per day first-shift capacity) opened Sept. 5.
- Clemens Food Group's Coldwater, Michigan, plant (12,000 head per day first shift capacity) opened Sept. 5.

None are up to their full first-shift capabilities yet, but they plan to be sometime this winter, providing much-needed throughput capacity for expanded hog production. Daily slaughter totals set a record the last week of September, but those likely will be topped as hog numbers increase seasonally this fall. That could not have happened without these new plants.

Trend Two: Continued Low Feed Costs
USDA forecasts a record soybean crop (4.431 billion bushels) and the third-largest corn crop (14.184 billion bushels), which has pushed corn and soybean meal futures prices lower and weakened price basis. The resulting low cash corn and meal prices have pushed production costs for pig farmers to the lowest levels since 2007.

My model of farrow-to-finish costs indicates that the low-cost 10 to 15 percent of U.S. producers will have costs...
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MORE CONTROL.

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in the $62/cwt carcass range this year. As of late September, those producers can lock in costs for 2018 at levels only slightly higher than that figure.

**Trend Three: Recovering Domestic Demand**

While exports are critically important to the U.S. pork industry, domestic consumers purchase roughly three-quarters of all U.S. pork production. This demand is a critical component of total pork demand, and thus wholesale pork and hog demand.

Consumer-level pork demand, which includes both retail and foodservice components, reached near-record highs in 2014 and 2015. Real per capita expenditures (RPCE) for pork – our chosen metric for the condition of U.S. pork demand – and pork’s demand index (a related metric) declined from their 2014-15 outlier levels in 2016 and struggled somewhat in early 2017.

Pork RPCE, however, has shown some strength as the year has progressed. Monthly RPCE totals were more than 10 percent lower than in January and February 2016, but they have been near year-ago levels since then and actually exceeded the 2016 level in July, the most recent month for which complete data are available, by 4 percent. RPCE for pork has been higher than its average over the past five years in four of the first seven months this year.

Should the industry be satisfied with these demand levels? No. This is one metric that every industry participant must always strive to improve. But neither should the industry be alarmed. Consumer level demand is still strong relative to historic levels.

**Trend Four: Surprising Exports**

No analyst that I know of had 2017 U.S. pork exports anywhere near as large as they were from January to July. USDA’s Economic Research Service was about the most bullish at the beginning of the year with a forecast of 4 percent growth. I was in that camp as well. Through July, total U.S. exports are up 10 percent from last year.

The weakening of the U.S. dollar against the currencies of both competitors and customers has been key.

This year’s weakness is, like the magnitude of export growth, a surprise to virtually everyone. Fiscal and monetary policy expectations at the beginning of the year suggested a stronger, not weaker, dollar yet the dollar has declined about 12 percent versus dollar index futures.

High wholesale prices this summer offset much of the exchange rate gain and July exports were nearly 4 percent lower than last year. But lower pork prices this fall bode well for exports as stronger currencies of our customers – most notably Mexico’s – will make U.S. products a bargain.

**Will the 2017 Trends Continue?**

Some will and some are more questionable. The only thing that will derail low feed costs is weather, and drought will return somewhere eventually. A drought in either the U.S. or South America will likely push corn into the $4 range and soybean meal into the $400s – not good but certainly not a disaster. It will take two such crop failures to drive costs sharply higher.

Production growth will continue until the producer sector suffers significant losses, and that is not likely based on the September Hogs and Pigs Report. Late-September corn, soybean meal and lean hogs futures imply profits of $17-plus per head for the best producers and $10 or so per head for average producers in 2018. Only losses stop growth.

Domestic demand will remain strong as long as the economy remains strong. That doesn’t mean demand will grow significantly, but it won’t be a problem, provided we avoid a recession. Consumer expectations and social issues will still be a challenge, but total per capita protein consumption will set a new record in 2019 and likely at a very healthy retail price.

This year’s export trend is the shakiest of the four. Current trade tensions could result in less access to key markets or, at least, strained relationships that might result in lower purchases. Even cursory inspection of recent data indicates that Mexico is the only growth market among our major customers.

China holds much potential. However, the roadblocks to export growth to China are significant. The EU is once again the largest pork exporter in the world and will remain a significant competitor for the foreseeable future.

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**Monthly U.S. Pork Exports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Million lbs., carcass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For July 2017 = -3.81%
YTD through July 31, 2017 = 10%

2004-2012 Trend

USDA Economic Research Service, EMI

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**TOP LINE**
The business magazine of the hog industry for over 50 years. National Hog Farmer provides professional pork producers with breaking news, business management guidance, and timely production information needed to keep modern pork production systems competitive and profitable.

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Antibiotic Alternatives: Moving Closer to Objective Comparison

By Mike King

Just like previous generations, today’s pork producers are always looking for ways to improve how they raise pigs. While that includes seeking advice from veterinarians and nutritionists, it’s also critical for producers to be able to compare apples to apples when it comes to something as important as choosing the right alternatives to antibiotics.

With the recent prohibition of all medically important antibiotics for growth promotion, the Pork Checkoff’s Animal Science Committee knew it was the right time to fund research to help producers decide what’s best for the health and growth of their pigs, according to Chris Hostetler, the Checkoff’s director of animal science.

“The search is on for the best products to replace antibiotic use related to growth and efficiency,” Hostetler said. “It’s important to have a scientifically valid way to compare products.”

The committee funded research to establish a standardized testing protocol for alternatives to antibiotics used for growth promotion. The study, proposed by Nick Gabler, assistant professor of swine nutrition and physiology at Iowa State University, will develop a protocol to define the critical components of methodology and experimental design to determine product efficacy.

“Gabler’s work will allow other studies on the same classification of compounds to be compared,” Hostetler said. “Finally, Gabler will validate the protocol by undertaking a study to provide data on options for antibiotic growth-promotion replacement in nursery diets.”

Interim Results Insightful

To date, Gabler and his team have reviewed nursery-finisher studies, including the methodology, experimental design and types of data reported. They uncovered 2,296 articles related to antibiotic alternatives for pigs.

The team filtered the results to remove duplicate articles and those published before 1990. This yielded 1,698 scientific articles to aid them in determining the necessary elements of methodology and experimental design.

While the direct, on-farm comparison tool is still a few months from being completed, the Iowa State researchers have identified specific classifications of compounds most efficacious

Impact of Antibiotic Alternatives on Average Daily Gain (ADG) Varies Widely

In a recent Checkoff-funded research project on antibiotic alternatives, Iowa State researchers found a wide variation on their effects on average daily gain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported ADG Response (%)</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase in ADG</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss in ADG</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change in ADG</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of scientific papers

Increases in ADG: Probiotic (267*)
Losses in ADG: Prebiotic (92*)
No change in ADG: 58
Not reported: 87

Increase in ADG: 39
Loss in ADG: 11
No change in ADG: 58
Not reported: 87

In a recent Checkoff-funded research project on antibiotic alternatives, Iowa State researchers found a wide variation on their effects on average daily gain.
in terms of on-farm production benefits.

For example, when researchers reviewed 267 studies on probiotics, they found a reported improvement on average daily gain 39 percent of the time. However, when researchers did the same with the 92 studies on prebiotics, they found a reported improvement in average daily gain only 11 percent of the time.

“The early results will guide future Checkoff research investments, as well as offer insight to producers on how certain classes of antibiotic alternatives have fared in past scientific studies,” Hostetler said. “This project demonstrates how Pork Checkoff research dollars are strategically invested to answer challenges producers face daily.”

The full report will be available later this year. To view the database now, go to pork.org/production-topics/animal-science/.
An Elkhart, Illinois, pork producer joined science and ethics experts at CRISPRcon this summer to explore the role of gene editing. The first-of-its-kind conference is named for the genome editing technique that is known as Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR).

Pork and grain producer Thomas Titus was part of a panel that discussed where CRISPR technology could take society by 2050. He was one of two farmers who joined scientific experts, physicians, patients, environmentalists, consumers and community leaders in exploring potential applications for gene editing, including human and animal health, agriculture and conservation.

“Gene editing will have a great impact on the future of farming and especially on livestock production,” Titus said. “Although in very early stages of development and acceptance, gene editing could ultimately be used to make pigs resistant to diseases, thereby improving food safety, animal welfare and the environmental impact.”

**PRRS-Resistant Pigs?**

Dave Pyburn, senior vice president of science and technology for the Pork Checkoff, noted that University of Missouri researchers are using gene editing to develop the first PRRS-resistant pigs.

“CRISPR technology allows precise changes to be made to the DNA of living cells, which holds the potential to transform agriculture and enable massive leaps forward in environmental and life science,” Pyburn said.

Through keynote speakers, panels and interactive discussions, the two-day CRISPRcon offered a forum for those with a stake in gene editing to share ideas, ask and answer questions and explore the path forward.

The Pork Checkoff and National Pork Producers Council supported Titus’ participation. Other panelists included representatives from the Center for Genetics and Society, the Institute for the Future, the PICO National Network and The Breakthrough Institute.

“Consumers are asking where their food comes from and how it is raised. That’s why I welcome every chance to talk about today’s pork production.”

— Thomas Titus, Illinois

**How Does Gene Editing Work?**

1. Targeted DNA strand is identified.
2. The targeted healthy DNA strand is defined and located.
3. A specifically designed synthetic guide molecule finds the target DNA strand.
4. An enzyme cuts off the target DNA strand.
5. The targeted DNA strand is replaced with a healthy one.
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Youth trying to find their path in life are often told that they can be anything they want as long as they are willing to work hard and do a good job. The Pork Checkoff’s recent first-ever Elite Pork Intern Summit reminded young people that careers in pork production can be both rewarding and diverse.

Nine production interns from across the U.S. attended the summit, which was held at the National Pork Board office in Des Moines, Iowa. The Pork Board hosted the event with the U.S. Pork Center of Excellence (USPCE). The group included interns from America’s top 30 pig farms.

“The pork industry attracts youth looking for careers as accountants, communicators, researchers, owner/operators and more,” said Ernie Barnes, director of industry services for the Pork Checkoff. “While it is great to see that interest, it also is encouraging to see youth who are passionate about working directly in the barns in animal care.”

The Elite Pork Intern Summit was a concept developed by a team at the National Pork Board and brought to fruition by Austin Pueschel. The animal science senior at Iowa State University was an intern this summer for the Checkoff’s Producer Services and for the USPCE.

“The summit provided pig farm interns a first-hand look into networking, developing team skills and expanding their knowledge for future careers on pig farms,” Pueschel said.

The interns who attended have ambitious post-graduation goals. Among the group, some hope to earn master’s and doctoral degrees in animal nutrition and animal handling, while others are planning to become veterinarians, barn managers, human resources managers and agricultural educators.

“Investing time to train and encourage youth is a good investment in our future as pork producers.”

– Brad Greenway, South Dakota

Developing the Next Generation of Caretakers

“These careers all include paths that lead back to the barn in some fashion or another,” Barnes said. “Developing the next generation of animal caretakers and pork production employees is key for the pork industry to continue to thrive and grow.”

During the two-day summit, the interns learned about career opportunities in the barn and beyond, with presentations from the National Pork Board, the USPCE and the National Pork Producers Council.

Speakers also put the spotlight on pork careers. They included Mike Gaul, director of career services at the College of Agriculture at Iowa State University; Marcos Fernandez, professor of animal sciences at Purdue University; Brad Greenway, the 2016 America’s Pig Farmer of the Year; and
Maynard Hogberg, retired dean of animal science at Iowa State University.

“The interns at the summit were eager to learn more about on-farm careers and other pork industry careers,” said Greenway, Mitchell, South Dakota. “Investing time to train and encourage youth is a good investment in our future as pork producers.”

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey also addressed the group.

Northey, who encouraged the youth to reach out to role models, leaders and those with the same passions in life, said, “When you say yes to something, you never know where it will take you.”

He also advised the interns to “tell the story of agriculture in a way that people can relate to,” such as sharing that there are seven pigs per person in Iowa.

Diane Sullivan, an anti-poverty advocate from Boston, also addressed the group. She discussed poverty in America and the vital role pig farmers play in helping to feed the nation.

“Our ability to feed ourselves is the one thing we as Americans can agree upon,” Sullivan said. “Agriculture is a grocery store.”

New Doors to Open

The interns appreciated learning more about careers in pork production.

“I felt very inspired,” said one intern at the summit’s conclusion. “I left with ideas about other doors I can walk through when it comes to pork production careers.”

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Checkoff Builds Momentum for Secure Pork Supply Plan

Plan to minimize business disruptions from a foreign animal disease

By Mike King

When it comes to the possibility of a foreign animal disease (FAD) outbreak or other major threat, the pork industry is taking a page from the Boy Scouts to “be prepared” with the continued development of the Secure Pork Supply plan for swine business continuity.

“The U.S. has not experienced a disease such as foot-and-mouth (FMD) since 1929,” said National Pork Board President Terry O’Neel, Friend, Nebraska. “But if FMD, African swine fever or another FAD hits, the plan will pay big dividends by helping production get back to normal faster.”

The Pork Board, as part of USDA’s Secure Food Supply framework, helped create the plan. The board invested Pork Checkoff funds to develop education and is now focusing on implementation. “USDA funding is specific to plan development, but there are areas the industry needs to fund to take it to the next level” said Patrick Webb, DVM, director of swine health programs for the Pork Checkoff. “For example, the Checkoff is developing a digital dashboard so producers can provide real-time access to data that state veterinarians will need to make decisions to allow pig movement.”

When implemented, the plan will facilitate safe movement of pigs with no evidence of disease from farms in a FAD control area to harvest channels or to other farms. Data required by the plan will help state veterinarians better understand what is going on in a control area during an outbreak.

“That will be critical for participating producers who need to move pigs,” Webb said. “While producer participation will be voluntary, that’s a strong reason to enroll.”

As the Checkoff works toward implementation, producers can take steps that will dovetail with the plan.

“The Checkoff’s FAD checklist offers key tips on what producers can do now to help the industry be prepared,” O’Neel said. “I encourage everyone to take a look at it.”

The Secure Pork Supply plan is the result of ongoing collaboration between USDA, the National Pork Board, the National Pork Producers Council, the American Association of Swine Veterinarians, academia and other state and federal partners.
Remit Checkoff Online

Now you can choose to make your Pork Checkoff payment electronically through the new online Checkoff remittance system, according to Calvin VandeKrol, vice president of finance and accounting for the Pork Checkoff.

“Similar to other online bill-pay programs, the new voluntary option eliminates the need for paperwork or mailing payments, VandeKrol said. “The online Checkoff remittance system provides convenience while keeping farm financial information secure. We wanted to tap into today’s technology to save producers time and hassles.”

He added, “Seedstock producers, fairs, packers and others who pay Checkoff can key in Checkoff information, process an EFT/ACH payment for the amount of their report and submit the report and payment to the National Pork Board online.”

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