

Feed savings can add up

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With the cost of feed rapidly increasing, feed costs is a major concern for many producers. While there is little the individual producer can do to influence ingredients prices, there are a number of things that can be done to reduce the total usage of feed in an operation. In short, anything that can improve feed conversion will improve profitability. This is always true but it becomes more important when feed costs are high.

Reduce feed wastage

The number one thing that can be done to reduce feed costs is to focus on reducing feed wastage. Research has shown that many feeders are not properly adjusted and feed wastage can be as high as 8 percent of all the feed going into the feeder. Two things can be done to reduce feed wastage. First, make sure the feeders are in good working order with no wholes, sharp edges, or broken corners. Broken or dysfunctional feeders should be repaired or replaced. Second, make sure feeders are adjusted correctly. Approximately 50% of the bottom of the feed pan should be visible at all times. If that is not the case then adjust the feeders to reduce the amount of feed falling into the feed pan. Also, make sure that old and moldy feed is not accumulating in the corners of the feeder because this will increase rooting in the feeder, which may increase feed wastage.

Pelleting and correct grinding improves feed utilization

Utilization of feed is usually increased by 5 to 10 percent if the feed is pelleted in stead of fed in a mash form. The economics of pelleting feed is better with increased costs of feed, and with current feed prices it would be economical to pellet the feed wherever this is possible. Feed utilization is also improved the finer the corn is ground because nutrient digestibility increases with finer grinding. Therefore, make sure the hammer mill or roller mill is adjusted to avoid too big particle sizes. However, both pelleting and fine grinding increase the risk of pigs developing ulcers and mortality may increase if the feed is ground too fine. An average particle size of 600 to 650 microns is recommended.

Additives to improve feed conversion

Several additives have been shown to improve feed conversion. Antibiotic growth promoters will usually increase feed conversion by 5 to 10 percent during the nursery phase and by 2 to 5 percent during the growing finishing phase. Acidifiers and direct fed microbials may also increase feed conversion during the nursery phase while the effect of

these additives is less pronounced during the growing finishing phase. The economics of using feed additives that improve feed conversion is better at higher feed costs and with current feed costs this may be something that is worth considering.

Market pigs at lighter weights

A pigs' utilization of feed is reduced as it becomes older and bigger because bigger pigs use more of the energy and nutrients in the feed for maintenance than do smaller pigs. The overall feed conversion will, therefore, be improved if pigs are marketed at a lighter weight. The profitability of marketing pigs at lighter weights depends on the packer grid and how successful the current marketing strategy is in avoiding shipping hogs that fall above the packer's window for maximum premiums. If a significant number of animals are currently shipped at weights that are above the window, a lower average shipping weight may be more profitable. A better sorting of pigs that can reduce the number of hogs being shipped at too high weights will also improve profits

A number of issues to consider

In times with high feed costs the economics of improving overall feed conversion is better than when feed prices are low. Some strategies such as pelleting or using feed additives may not be economical at low feed costs, but may become attractive with higher feed costs. Other strategies such as reducing feed wastage and shipping pigs within the packers optimal window for premiums will always improve profitability but more so when feed costs are high. With current feed costs, many producers would be able to improve profitability by focusing on improving overall feed conversion in the herd.