



HOGS *YOUR* WAY



Choosing a
Hog Production
System in the
Upper Midwest



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(* COAFES: College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences)

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Overview

WHAT THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU DO

- **CLARIFY** your goals in considering hog production options.
- **UNDERSTAND** the range of options you have in the Upper Midwest.
- **IDENTIFY** those that fit your strengths, interests and resources.
- **ENCOURAGE** further planning, discussion and networking at the grassroots level.
- **PROVIDE** contact information to research areas of interest on your own.

WHAT THIS GUIDE WILL NOT DO

- **COVER** every system or combinations of these used in the upper Midwest.
- **PROVIDE** state-of-the-art technical data.
- **REPLACE** the expertise and counsel of breeders, nutritionists, veterinarians, accountants, attorneys, contractors or consultants.
- **GUARANTEE** success, sustainability or personal satisfaction.
- **MAKE** decisions for you.

HOW YOU CAN USE THIS GUIDE

- **SKIM** the entire guide (to get an overview).
- **READ** sections of greatest interest (to satisfy an immediate need or curiosity).
- **START** at the beginning (to use a systematic approach to your situation).
- **PERSONALIZE** your guide—highlight or circle important ideas.
- **REFER** to additional resources listed for more details to make your decision.

WHY THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED

- **HELP** farmers compete, prosper and create operations with mid- to long-term potential.
- **ENCOURAGE** producers of different types, sizes and philosophies to coexist and cooperate, recognizing that there is no single perfect production system.
- **OFFER** options that can provide market access to smaller or newer pork producers.
- **BUILD** upon the expertise and experience of noted authorities, working together as an integrated team.
- **SUPPORT** pork production in the upper Midwest as a vital contribution to a well-balanced economy.
- **HELP** producers who are ready to make a change in their enterprise. This guide is not designed for producers satisfied with their current setup.

Thinking of a Change?

Hogs Your Way was created and produced for farmers considering adding, changing or expanding hog production in their portfolio of farm enterprises. It is designed to help you make decisions on how to raise hogs in a way that best fits your overall personal, family and financial goals.

The challenges associated with hog production have increased over the last few years. Low prices and rising costs, environmental concerns, concerns about food safety, and social controversies have made hog production more challenging for farmers. However, in the midst of this there are farmers who are excited about their hog production systems, their enterprises and their future. *Hogs Your Way* tells stories of some of these farmers and describes the production systems they are using. Some of these practices are not often seen in the farm press and are not widely known. *Hogs Your Way* presents these alternative systems as well as the more conventional confinement system, with the goal of increasing awareness of the range of options for hog production available to Upper Midwest farmers as they try to adapt to these challenges.

In addition to providing an overview of four production system options, *Hogs Your Way* challenges you to consider your “big picture” in making your choice. A new or expanded enterprise on your farm can have a variety of impacts on your work, finances, quality of life, family and community. It may require additional labor or new skills. Capitalization requirements may limit your options, and the mix of labor and capital will determine how susceptible you are to variations in the market, and may influence your children’s ability to buy into the farm at your retirement. Your decision to invest in single-use or flexible buildings and equipment can limit your options during down cycles, or when other parameters of your operation change. The type and quality of the work can have an influence on whether your children want to join you in continuing the enterprise. Increasing public and private concerns about the environmental impacts of agriculture could lead to comments from your community or to new regulations, either of which may further affect your decision.

How to Use This Guide

Hogs Your Way contains four sections:

Taking Stock and Clarifying Values

Production Options

Selecting an Option

For More Information

The first section contains questions designed to stimulate you and your family to think about your goals, your farm, and your potential hog enterprise. The next section provides an overview of four hog production options in the Upper Midwest and includes profiles of Upper Midwest farmers who have used them. The third section will help you bring together what you learned in the first two sections to determine which hog production options are best for you. The last section will help direct you to additional sources of information that may be helpful as you further explore your decision.

How *Hogs Your Way* Was Developed

Hogs Your Way emerged from a review of farmer demonstration grants for alternative hog production systems, funded by the Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. This program funds producer-initiated on-farm research on a wide variety of topics. Interviews were conducted during the summer of 1996 and 1998 with several farmers who participated in this program, as well as with Scott Hislop, a traditional confinement producer. Two farmers' profiles were added later. Those farmers were interviewed for the first time in late 1999 and in July, 2000 (Dave Struthers and Larry Liepold, respectively). In July, 2000, we spoke again with the farmers interviewed earlier to see how they had fared during the past four years in a rapidly changing industry. This provided an opportunity to determine whether they were still happy with their systems and if they had adapted certain aspects of their systems based on more experience. Falling hog prices during the winter and spring of 1998-99 provided a test of how these farmers could survive price "disasters." All were still producing hogs as of this writing, an accomplishment in an industry that is rapidly losing hog farmers. Not surprisingly, many of the changes they have implemented in the last two to four years have more to do with marketing than with actual production practices. All producers, large or small scale, traditional confinement or alternative systems, were happy with their present systems—some were downright "evangelistic." All of the farmers emphasized that the system must fit your individual personality, your goals and your values. So, before you decide on an option, take the time to think about your situation, then complete the first section, "Taking Stock and Clarifying Values."