

Marketing Finisher Pigs in the U.S.

When to market, where to market, and how to market all are important economic decisions for the pork producer, since receiving top value for finished pigs can be the difference between profit and loss. To get the highest consistent returns, producers often must consider animals' weight and uniformity when determining when to sell, in addition to the current market price. These considerations can relate to herd health management.

The USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) examined how swine producers marketed their finished pigs in the Swine 1995 study. Herds located in the 16 states¹ involved in the Swine '95 project represented nearly three-fourths of U.S. pork producers and over 90 percent of the hog inventory.

NAHMS asked producers the relative importance of factors which determine when they send pigs to market. A pig's weight was by far the most significant factor with 94.4 percent of the operations considering weight as either a *very* or *extremely* important factor in their decision as when to send pigs to market (Figure 1).

Market price was *very* or *extremely* important for 26.7 percent of the producers. Market price was *not* or only *slightly* important to 41.2 percent of the operations. More room in the finisher to prevent overcrowding may have been a more pressing concern for some of these producers, since 24.7 percent rated needed space for incoming pigs as *very* or *extremely* important.

Figure 1

Factors Considered Very or Extremely Important When Sending Finishing Pigs to Slaughter Market

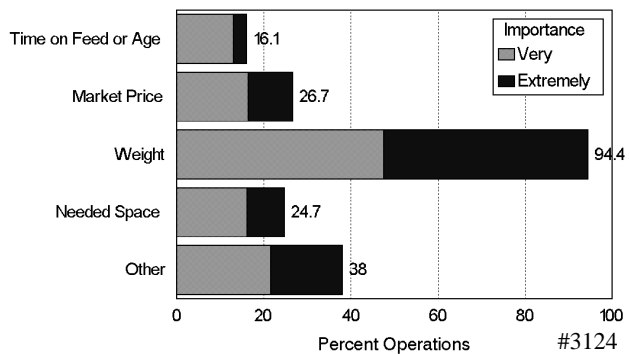
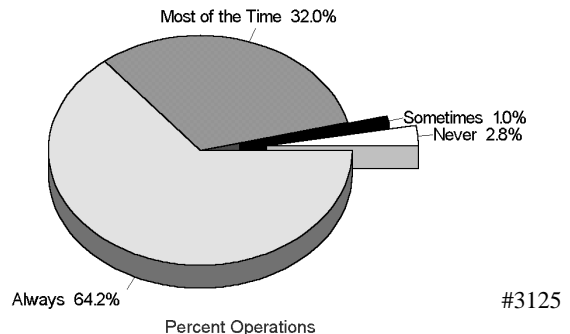


Figure 2

Assembling Uniform Groups of Pigs Based on Weight for Slaughter



Lately, product uniformity has become a beacon in the pork industry. Many packers give premiums to producers that bring uniform-sized pigs of similar lean quality for slaughter. Pork producers are responding to this packer request by attempting to send a homogeneous group of pigs to the slaughter market. Sixty-four percent of U.S. operations *always* assembled a uniform group for the slaughter market

¹ Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

based on weight, and 32 percent accomplished this management practice *most of the time* (Figure 2). Only 3.8 percent *never* or *sometimes* did.

All-in, all-out is a recommended management practice in the grower/finisher phase of production as well as in the farrowing and nursery phases. Only 1.7 percent of U.S. operations (4.3 percent of hogs marketed) *always* marketed all animals in a pen or building (Figure 3). Variation in size at market time, severe price penalties, and refusal by some slaughter markets to buy light-weight pigs are factors that prevent producers from regularly practicing all-in, all-out management.

Over 64 percent of U.S. pork operations marketed all except a few animals in a pen or building *sometimes* (39.9 percent) or *most of the time* (24.5 percent), keeping back a few for additional feeding. Moving these light-weight pigs to another area for final finishing will lower the risk of transmitting disease organisms common to the farm to new pigs entering the building.

The most common technique for operations marketing pigs was selling to a slaughter plant buying station, with 65.4 percent using this method to sell 38.1 percent of the total number of pigs marketed (Figure 4). However, most hogs were sold directly to the slaughter plant (55.1 percent). Only 11.2 percent of U.S. operations (2.4 percent of U.S. pigs) marketed pigs for slaughter through auction. Figure 5 shows a regional breakdown of producers marketing through cooperatives.

More than 80 percent of all pigs travelled 200 miles or less to slaughter, and more than half travelled 100 miles or less. Pigs travelled further to market in the southeast region, where only a quarter travelled 50 miles or less. About one-third of all pigs in the northcentral and the midwest were within 50 miles of delivery to a slaughter plant.

NAHMS collaborators on the Swine '95 study included the National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA); State and Federal Veterinary Medical Officers and Animal Health Technicians; and the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (USDA:APHIS:VS).

Figure 3

Marketing All Animals in a Pen or Building for Slaughter

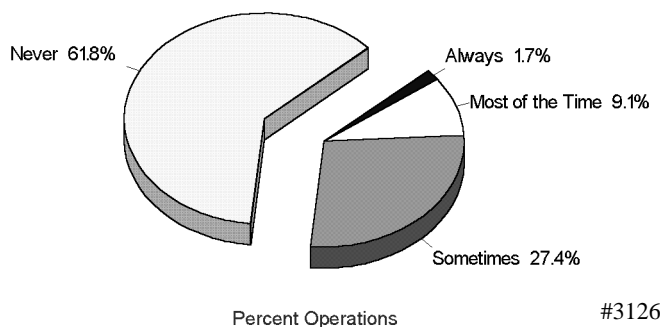


Figure 4

Method of Selling Grower/Finisher Pigs to Market

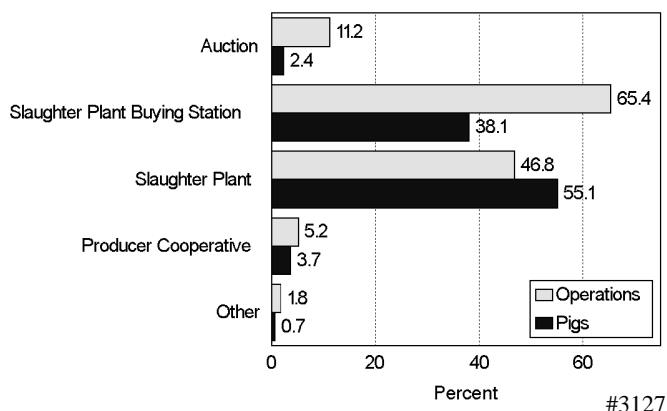
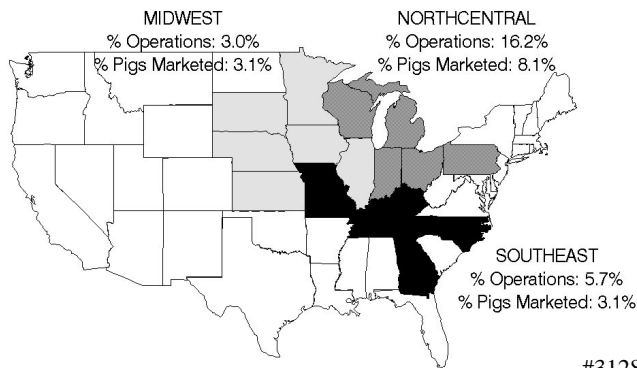


Figure 5

Marketing Grower/Finisher Pigs Via Cooperative



For more information on the Swine '95 study, contact: Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health; USDA:APHIS:VS, Attn. NAHMS
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