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Best weight to market hogs? (1986)

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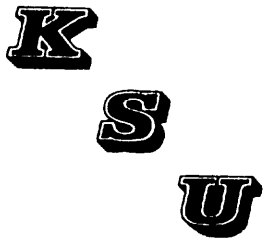

BEST WEIGHT TO MARKET HOGS?

R. H. Hines

One of the important, recurring decisions that each hog producer must make is the weight at which to sell hogs.

The decision to sell hogs may be influenced by cost and availability of feed, anticipated market hog price changes, weather conditions, overcrowding or need for facilities, or the need for cash for unpaid bills. All of these factors play an intricate role in the decision to market; however, the choice of when to sell may also influence production costs, price received, and carcass quality.

The questions that pork producers need to ask themselves before arbitrarily making the decision to market hogs at heavier weights (250-275 lbs) are:

(1) How many pounds of feed per pound of gain will be required to produce gains above 220-240 lbs?

(2) How much extra time will be required for hogs to reach the heavier weight?

(3) What effect will the added weight have on carcass acceptability and lean meat yield?

Numerous research reports indicate that the amount of feed required per pound of gain increases as the weight of the pig increases. Feed efficiency of finishing pigs (100 lbs. to 230 lb) will usually range between 3.2 and 3.9, with variations from type of ration, feed additives, genetic ability of the pig, facilities, weather, etc. As the pig grows heavier (225-250 lbs.), feed required per pound of gain will increase to approximately 4.0 to 4.5. Gains from 250 to 275 lbs will require 4.5 to 5.0 lbs of feed per pound of gain.

In studies at KSU, average daily gain decreased after pigs reached 200 lbs. This agrees with experiments conducted at the Minnesota and Louisiana stations; whereas studies at Penn State and Oklahoma indicated a leveling off of gains after 200 lbs. The reduced rate of gain observed at KSU resulted in approximately 20-25 days additional feeding time to gain each additional 30 lbs.

The price received for market hogs varies with the weight of the hogs. Generally, buyers pay more for hogs weighing between 220 and 240 lbs than for hogs that are lighter or heavier than this preferred weight. On a given day, supply of hogs will dictate the amount of discount to be imposed for light or heavy hogs. Although discounts will vary, heavy hogs are usually $.25 to $.50/cwt lower per 10 lb increment above the preferred weight.

In KSU studies, barrows slaughtered at 230 lbs. yielded shorter, leaner carcass with less loin eye area than barrows slaughtered at 260 lbs. The percent lean cut yields was the same. Barrows slaughtered at 290 lbs. were significantly fatter and longer, with larger loin eyes than barrows slaughtered at 230 lbs. Percent lean cuts were similar for all weight groups of barrows. Muscle quality as indicated by marbling, firmness, and color palatability was not affected by slaughter weight.

The optimum weight will depend on what kind of pig is being produced. The bigger framed pig is relatively efficient no matter what market weight you choose. The smaller frame pig lacks flexibility of going to heavier weight should economics justify it.

The decision to market hogs routinely at heavier weights will result in the following: (1) increased days on feed, (2) increased cost of feed per pound of pork produced, and (3) a lower price per cwt. of live hogs. Therefore, the weight that is most profitable will depend upon market price, probability of price change, weight discounts, production costs, type of facilities, and type of hogs.