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COMMERCIAL SERVICES



# Resolve for success

True to tradition, many of us are making New Year's resolutions. We at NSR are no different. In order to get more of the "commercial word" out to our audience, we are introducing Commercial Connection to keep you informed on the latest commercial news and features relevant to the industry.

**Change is coming.** The saying goes, "The only thing constant in the world is change."

And the swine industry is no different. No matter the direction of your farm, you'll likely make some adaptation to remain a viable part of the industry. Whether it is re-formulating diets, honing your marketing skills, reducing your input costs or evaluating genetics... the list can go on and on.

And if you don't have enough to worry about, I would offer one more area that with which we need to be concerned – pork quality.

In recent months, we've seen much press on the dramatic differences in beef and pork demand. Some suggest that selection programs for leanness have indeed provided a leaner product desired by consumers, at the expense of decreased eating experience.

This became even more evident when I attended a seminar entitled "Benchmarking Value in the Pork Supply Chain," sponsored by the American Meat Science Association. (See related article on pg. 24.)

The largest single increase in costs to the industry since 1992 were the quality issues like PSE, two-tone meat and water-holding capacity, among others.

These costs were directly associated with packer/processor losses, re-work, costs to sort product, and the like.

It did not include the lost opportunity from someone having a bad eating experience and either holding off on pork purchases or at worst, foregoing pork altogether.

I would venture to guess that I am not the only one to have a poor pork eating experience recently at a restaurant or banquet. We do indeed have a problem.

Now, if you are a commercial producer or breeder that often has one of your own pigs processed for your family's freezer, you may disagree with me. Isn't it interesting that those that normally eat their home-grown pork usually always select an animal that is not

extremely lean because they want a "good-eatin' pork chop?"

But, we sometimes load just the opposite on the truck to market for a "lean premium."

No wonder the benchmarking study indicated a concern about quality!

For those that say, "The industry does not pay for quality, so why should I change," my argument is simple.

If we don't fix the problem, the one not paying will be the consumer when he or she chooses to purchase something other than pork.

What can you as a breeder or commercial producer do about it? Well, for starters, you need to know your current status by talking to your packer.

I realize this can be difficult at best, because most packers have not been successful at assessing pork quality at line speeds. Many rely on representative cut tests to evaluate potential quality challenges.

Second, simply focus on more production-designed animals to yield some results. Extremely lean, heavy-musled animals may command a higher price on the rail, but the slower growth may tie up more finishing space. In addition, these types of animals, although they are highly feed efficient, often have lower feed intakes, which can lead to health challenges.

Third, address management, nutrition and animal handling that may affect pork quality.

Finally, attack the quality issues with genetic selection of replacement animals.

Without a doubt, your sires and dams must be free of the stress gene. This one step will greatly minimize the incidence of PSE pork and downer animals. And just as important, ask your genetic supplier for data on meat-quality traits.

NSR has risen to the challenge and recently released EPDs to breeders participating in the NSR Pork Quality Alliance. Tools like this will allow the breeders and their customers to make progressive steps to improve pork quality.

## **Resolve to be part of the solution.**

You can help improve pork quality. Technical information and genetics are available for you to make great strides in improving pork. Combine this with sound selection of production-oriented animals, and together we can position pork as the meat of choice. **SE**

commercial connection

# Profiting from family values

*Western states hog farmers have combined family values and an efficient marketing strategy to find a niche for their premium pork.*

>> Maggie J. Malson

Producing the best pork in the world is the mission of Salmon Creek Farms (SCF) of Twin Falls, Idaho. Established in 1995 by Mark Boggess and three partners, SCF markets its product under the Salmon Creek Farms Natural Pork label.

"People are looking for peace of mind and assurance they are eating a wholesome, quality product," Boggess says. "That's what has made us so successful. We provide that product with a story and accountability. We guarantee our quality is as good as anything else in the world."

**From Iowa to Idaho.** Boggess grew up in Iowa around the hog industry and received his Ph.D. in animal breeding from Iowa State in 1990. But, the opportunity to work as a livestock specialist with the University of Idaho relocated him to the Gem State.

When he moved to Idaho, he started building his Duroc, Hampshire and Yorkshire herds. Along with wife, Heather, and 14-year-old son, Noah, Boggess is committed to the hog industry and providing for his family. Other family members include daughters, Savannah, 20, Kylie, 18, Baylee, 2, and son Daniel, 7 months. Father-in-law Mickey Speirs is the on-site feed manager of the farm.

Boggess' operation is dedicated to "old school" family values and cutting-edge technology and management.

"Heather and I enjoy the farm and country life," he says. "We enjoy working and showing hogs together. We especially like meeting and working with fellow pork producers all across the West."

The farm is a 350-sow farrow-to-finish operation with both commercial and purebred sows. It farrows on a 28-day schedule with weaning at 17-20 days. The facilities include a gestation-farrowing building, nursery, two finish buildings and an off-site feed mill, boar stud and visitor center. Because the herd is closed, SCF offers high health status production hogs and seedstock. Semen and showpigs are also available year round. SCF works with Independent Meat Co. of Twin Falls, Idaho, on its own line of branded, high-quality, naturally processed pork products – Salmon Creek Farms "Natural Pork."

In 2002, Boggess organized a group of growers into the Salmon Creek Farm Marketing Association

(SCFMA) in order to market their "Natural Pork." The association was organized in concert with input from Independent Meat Co. and in conjunction with a competitive USDA Value-Added Development Grant.

"Our entire program is built around the families that produce, process and market our pork," Boggess explains. "We are comprised of small, family-owned sustainable farms working together with locally



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>> Mark Boggess

owned small businesses to produce the highest quality pork."

The program has grown to 25 producers located in Utah, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Canada. At present, they have about 10,000 Landrace/Yorkshire crossbred sows in production, with plans to expand in the future. These growers utilize SCF genetics and other genetic sources approved by SCF.

**Meeting high quality standards.** With the goal of producing the highest-quality pork in the world, SCFMA has established a quality assurance program orchestrated by a board of directors.

"Every step of our production and processing system is designed to produce extraordinary tenderness, juiciness and flavor in our premium pork," says Boggess. "Our genetic, nutritional management and pork-processing techniques are state-of-the-art and are closely monitored and audited to ensure absolute quality and consistency at every point."

Three to four times per year, third-party audits are conducted with each producer to ensure they are meeting the high standards expected by SCFMA.

Each producer's market hogs are also thoroughly evaluated for cutability and product quality several times a year.

Each producer in the program was recruited by SCF because they were already producing a quality pork product or they were currently marketing with

Independent Meat Co.

To provide all members of the SCF Natural Pork program, from producers to retailers, with a global view of the SCFMA ideal, SCFMA held the First Annual SCFMA Natural Pork Symposium in September.

The symposium was designed to give everyone involved in SCF Natural Pork a better appreciation of the process from start to finish. Speakers included veterinarians, geneticists, USDA and National Pork Board representatives, as well as marketing experts, product distributors, and retail and food-service clientele. Boggess says the symposium was very well attended and was a tremendous success.

Another event for producers is planned for March or April, focusing on technical aspects of raising hogs.

To ensure a wholesome, all-natural product, SCF Natural Pork is produced with no antibiotics, rendered-animal products or enhancements. SCF Natural Pork is produced using wheat and barley instead of corn as the grain base to ensure a consistent white color and firm texture of the trimmed fat and lean.

Dane Bourquin, sales manager for Independent Meat Co., says the quality of the SCF pork coming through his plant for processing is second to none.

"All the management that goes into producing pork for this label... makes it very consistent and uniform," says Bourquin, who has been with the company for 25 years. "Each time we cut it, we know what to expect. This pork has a high pH, good marbling and water holding capacity."

Boggess says animal care is also important to SCF. "Our family farmers are committed to the welfare of their animals and to the sustainability of their farms, for themselves, their children and grandchildren," Boggess says. "Consequently, our management and production protocols ensure the care and comfort of every animal in our charge each and every day."

The SCF Natural Pork program is based on credible science, common sense and generations of compassionate, caring animal husbandry.

All records and management and processing protocols are third party audited. Parts of the production processes have been submitted to the USDA for Process Verification certification. The SCFMA is in the process of applying for certification through the Northwest Food Alliance and for Free-Farmed certification through the American Humane Society. Finally, all producer members of the SCFMA are required to complete the Swine Welfare Assurance Program<sup>SM</sup> and the Pork Quality Assurance Program through the National Pork Board.

Paying close attention to the genetic makeup of the herds also helps SCF produce consistency and uniformity in their product. All sows are bred to Duroc boars. And only specific lines of the breed are used to ensure even more consistency and to meet target specifications for cutability and quality. SCF utilizes the pedigree and technology information

offered by NSR to identify superior genetic lines.

Choosing not to compete against commodity-priced pork products, the SCFMA has created opportunity for itself by marketing to mid-size grocers and high-end restaurants.

"The SCFMA was formed to allow our family businesses to compete and thrive in a production environment dominated by large-scale corporate entities," Boggess says. "Our association is unique in that it allows us to combine the best of both worlds—personal, individual care and attention are combined with production and marketing efficiency and extraordinary pork quality."

The SCFMA has found its target markets in Florida, Colorado, California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Idaho and the Pacific Rim, mainly in Japan.

"We try to stay extremely competitive in price, but we have looked for customers who desire value-added products," Bourquin says. "All of the extra time and care put into producing this pork adds value. But, it also leads to high quality and thus a pleasurable eating experience every time."

One such customer is Gary Jensen, who is the department supervisor for Vans Incorporated Group. They have six retail grocery stores throughout Montana and have carried the product for two years.

"I've been in the business 32 years, and what impresses me the most about the SCF Natural Pork



SCF works closely with Independent Meat Co. of Twin Falls, Idaho, to ensure the quality of the product through processing.

products is, customers will come into our stores on a daily basis and tell us how good the pork is," he says.

In 2003, the demand for SCF Natural Pork has increased dramatically, causing Independent Meat Co. to reach maximum capacity in processing. They have gone from processing 2,300 hogs to 3,600 hogs per week. But, Boggess isn't ready to stop there.

"We would like to get bigger," he says. "We feel there is a real desire by consumers to find a product that is free of antibiotics and enhancements, has a story, a guarantee and accountability.

"That's where we fit in, he continues. "We can provide them with the best and do consistently." **SE**

## Winter 2003/2004 STAGES Sire Summary released

The latest Trait Leader list is now available, including sires with EPDs and indexes for economically important traits.

Whether you are a small breeder or a large commercial breeder, this can be an excellent genetic-selection tool. Call the NSR office today for your free copy, or check us out on the Web at [www.nationalswine.com](http://www.nationalswine.com), and click on the STAGES logo.

## Benchmarking value in the pork-supply chain

The American Meat Science Association, with financial support from NSR, National Pork Board, various packers and other swine genetics companies, conducted an extensive study of the pork-supply chain as a follow-up to a 1992 study.

In 1992, excessive back fat, inadequate muscle color/water-holding capacity, inconsistent live weights, too many abscesses and excessive bruising were identified and quantified as serious pork-quality issues for producers and processors.

The 2002 study was expanded to include consumer's acceptability of pork, in addition to the packer/processor and producer aspects.

The first phase of the study, conducted by meat scientists at the University of Illinois, identified that pork-quality consistency has become a more-prominent issue than in 1992, when excessive back fat was the major concern.

Continued concern with PSE, thin bellies, inconsistent weights, fat carcasses and abscesses/injection sites top the list for the packer segment.

The second phase, conducted by the Texas A&M University meat science department, focused on ham and belly processing by the further-processing segment of the pork industry.

One objective of this phase was to evaluate the effects that PSE lean has on the production of bone-in and boneless hams. Processors clearly prefer to work with low-incidence PSE,

due to less rework, great consumer acceptance, and that bone-in hams with higher pH have less drip loss and improved processing yields.

The other objective was to evaluate bellies. Thin, normal and thick bellies were analyzed for processing ability, consumer preference and eating qualities. With both hams and bellies, consistency was again identified as a major concern.

The third phase of the study was directed by Colorado State University.

Retail display area for entire meat departments in eight metropolitan areas was measured for space dedicated to each meat product.

Samples of boneless chops, bacon and hams were purchased and evaluated for consumer acceptance.

There was no significant price difference between pork chops classified as low, average or high quality, but consumer and laboratory analysis showed significant differences.

Also, data was collected on enhanced versus non-enhanced pork loins and their presence in the marketplace. Results of the retail survey will be beneficial in developing new products and strategies for adding value to pork products and meeting consumer demands.

## Pork 101

Pork 101 is a comprehensive 3-day experience on quality and consistency issues in the pork industry. Attendees gain hands-on experience with hog selection and evaluation, carcass fabrication, bacon and ham curing and sensory evaluation.

Three 2004 locations:  
March 8-10, Iowa State University, Ames  
April 20-22, University of Nebraska, Lincoln  
May 25-27, Texas A&M University, College Station

Space is limited to the first 32 applicants per each location. \$495 per participant covers materials and four meals. Lodging is not included.

Contact the American Meat Science Association at (217) 356-5368 or Rick Pfortmiller at the NSR office.

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