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Survey finds support for open housing for sows

Rod Smith

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In a recent survey, 53% of pork producers said they already have housing systems other than gestation stalls or plan to change to more open pens.

Fully 25% said they do not use gestation stalls, 14% said they plan to adopt to open pens and another 14% said they plan to convert to stalls with gates that open and permit sows to move around.

Only 10% of producers said they are continuing to use gestation stalls.

It should be emphasized that the survey was conducted over a random and small number of producers -- 550 producers -- and that only one-third of them said they have sows on their farms.

The survey, commissioned by the National Pork Board and conducted by polling company Moore Information, revealed an industry with a positive attitude despite an industry that took huge losses last year and is forecasted to take equally large losses this year (*Feedstuffs*, March 4).

The survey found that 87% of pork producers said if they know what they know now and were given an opportunity to get into pork production again, they would. That compares with 90% for the two most-satisfied occupations: municipal fire fighters and singers, according to an article reporting the survey results in the spring issue of the *Pork Checkoff Report* magazine.

The magazine, a publication of the National Pork Board, was distributed at the National Pork Forum in Orland, Fla., March 8.

Another positive is that 59% of producers believe the industry is generally headed in the right direction. The number is down from 76% in the last survey but is still the highest it has been in 10 years. (In 2003, only 28% of producers thought the industry was moving in the right direction.)

Especially pleasing, according to the article in the magazine, is that 85% of producers support the pork checkoff, the highest level of support in 11 years.

In response to a question concerning producers' biggest challenges, 22% said high feed costs, 13% said high pork prices and profitability and 12% said herd health issues.

Nevertheless, almost half of producers said the checkoff is needed most to make sure grocery and restaurant companies understand pork production practices and pork products and to build and maintain consumer demand.

Even though producers were told consumers react most favorably to pork production when producers are referred to as hog farmers or pig farmers, 76% said they still prefer to be identified as pork producers.

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