

Swine Institute Covers External Pressures And Internal Controls

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COLUMBIA, MO.

The hog industry always faces challenges; however, this year the industry has new opportunities to exercise preemptive control over many of the issues confronting producers. The 2012 Swine Institute, held November 7 in Columbia, focused on addressing external pressures and internal controls.

The drought experienced by most of the Midwest was unexpected and devastating to crop farmers. In turn, the drought affected hog farmers – primarily by grain shortages and the subsequent high cost of feed. Drought inflicted hardships caused producers to cut back on herd size.

However, “Those cutbacks will produce higher prices at market,” said Dr. Ron Plain, University of Missouri Extension economist. Plain gave a presentation on the market outlook and economic trends at the Institute. “Also, positive on the market front, pork exports will set a new record in 2013,” said Plain. “We are cutting production but if corn is reasonable we should be back in the black by mid June.”

Plain led off the Institute, followed by speakers whose topics ranged from nuisance insurance to sow housing choices. “Over 70 people attended the annual conference,” said Dr. Rex Ricketts, director of the University of Missouri Extension Commercial Agriculture Program (CA), which presents the annual Swine Institute. “Over 90 percent of the pigs raised in Missouri were represented by the producers in attendance,” said Ricketts.

The last presentation, following dinner, generated an intense and lively discussion with the audience. Dr. Tim Safranski, University of Missouri reproductive specialist, spoke about the challenges pig producers face due to the shift to phase out gestational stalls. He was joined by Steve Brier of Murphy Brown who illustrated his experience with free access systems.

Safranski reviewed the five freedoms approach commonly accepted to summarize the basic elements in the delivery of welfare. “Unfortunately, the most publicized freedom: freedom to express normal behavior, often prevents actualization of the other four,” said Safranski. “Freedom from hunger and malnutrition for young piglets cannot be realized without safe access to the sow. Freedom from pain, injury, fear and distress are also limited without gestational housing.”

Brier explained Murphy Brown’s guidelines, which permit stalls for 42-45 days post-breeding, allowing employees access to deliver necessary veterinary needs, confirm AI, to recognize and treat underweight sows, and protect other sows from injury by aggressive behavior when the sows are in heat.

Attorney Jean Paul Bradshaw, partner, Lathrop & Gage spoke about nuisance insurance, advising producers to read the fine print in their policies and get clarifications from their insurers in writing to be sure they are covered for both past and future potential infractions.

“Nuisance is the unreasonable use of land that significantly impairs another’s use and enjoyment of their property,” said Bradshaw. “The Missouri legislature capped non-economic damages (pain and suffering) at \$500,000, however the Missouri Supreme Court may overturn that decision.”

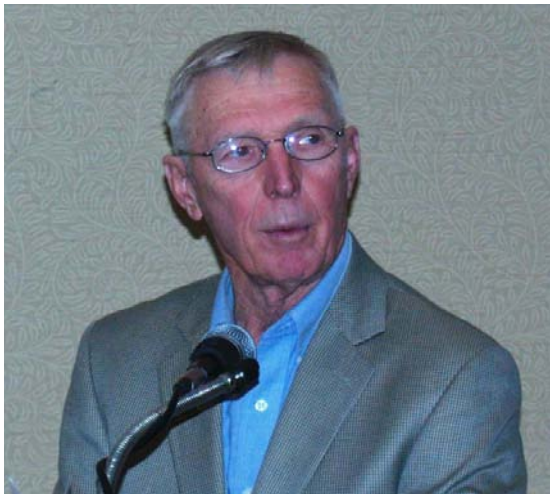
Another legal subject of concern for producers, making hiring decisions while minimizing legal liability and decreasing the risk of infiltrators and saboteurs, was addressed by speaker, Trina Le Riche, a partner/shareholder with Ogletree Deakins PC.

“I call it near-mission (im)possible,” said Le Riche. “To recruit, select and hire a skilled, dedicated, reliable, loyal and collaborative employee and to do your screening legally to avoid hiring an infiltrator. You must be circumspect in avoiding many questions you obviously need answers to in order to hire an employee that will be loyal to your business and not have hidden ulterior motives that in turn could sabotage your operation.”

Laws prevent employers from asking questions directly referring to race, national origin, disabilities or beliefs that may prevent the potential employee from doing their job. “Don’t go there,” said Le Riche. “Don’t ask or they may tell.” Le Riche does not feel that reference checks are necessarily worth the effort. “There are legal implications involved with an employer making inquiries, and too often personal refer-

ences are false in that the person given to contact is in reality a friend of the applicant.”

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) applies if an employer uses a consumer report furnished by a third-party vendor. Consumer reports rate credit worthiness, credit standing and capacity, as well as character, reputation, personal characteristic and mode of living. “Yet, if you use any of this information specifically in denying em-



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ployment, the applicant could sue you,” warned Le Riche.

“The same applies to making criminal background checks. For example, you cannot deny an applicant employment because of a felony conviction unless the felony would have direct impact on the nature of the job the applicant would be hired to do.”

The Swine Institute addressed health issues such as mycoplasma elimination from breeding herds. Veterinarian Paul Yeske, a partner in the Minnesota firm, the Swine Vet Center, spoke on the subject and joined Commercial Agriculture’s swine veterinarian Beth Young, to discuss PRRS control strategies.

Members of the CA swine focus team, Drs. Marcia Shannon, John Lory, Ray Massey and MU veterinary pathologist, Dr. Tim Evans, gave presentations on dealing with drought with respect to health effects (specifically aflatoxins), feeding, and manure management.

Joe Horner, CA economist, spoke about the problems inherent in generational transfer of the family farm. Horner advised, “The first rule of business is, if your business is not competitive, don’t compete.” He then gave producers suggestions on how to get the family, farm and financials working together to achieve that goal.

Ray Massey, CA economist, chaired the 2012 Swine Institute and selected the variety of topics covered. Additional information on all of the subjects presented can be accessed online at <http://agebb.missouri.edu/swine/>; by phoning the Commercial Agriculture Program office at 573 882-0378; or emailing rickettsr@missouri.edu or masseyr@missouri.edu. Δ

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