

The United States Pork Center of Excellence and the Pork Information Gateway

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As it has often been said, we are living in the “Information Age”. Because of computer technology and specifically the internet, citizens today, including hog farmers, have access to vastly more information than did their forbears. There are literally thousands of sites on the world-wide-web at which swine farmers can gather information on any topic relevant to pork production. In fact, as I was writing this article, I paused and went to a popular computer search engine. I typed in three key words: Swine, Production, and Information; I hit the Google search button, and in 0.19 seconds, 38,900,000 “hits” were obtained! That equates to one site for about every eight people living in the U.S.

Sometimes all that information at our finger tips can get overwhelming and it becomes difficult to determine just where are the best, most reliable sources of pig information on the web. Nobody wants, or has the time, to sift through over 38 million sites when they need an answer! This issue was addressed in a paper published in the proceedings of the 2007 Virginia Pork Industry Conference (Estienne and Harper, 2007). In this livestock update, I would like to focus on one particularly good site that was mentioned in that article, that being the U.S. Pork Center of Excellence’s (USPCE) website: <http://www.usporkcenter.org/home.aspx>.

If you are not familiar with the USPCE, it was established on July 1st, 2005 for the purpose of bringing about greater cooperation and collaboration among universities, the pork industry, and government. Budget realities and attrition have forced many universities to reconsider their role in providing pork producers with research and extension programs. Indeed, the current economic times have resulted in far fewer personnel and programs available for pork producers nationwide. The mission of the USPCE is *to add value to the pork industry by facilitating research and learning for U.S. pork producers through national collaboration*.

Dr. David Meisinger serves as the Executive Director of the USPCE. And although housed at the National Swine Research and Information Center on the campus of Iowa State University, the USPCE represents a public/private partnership that includes land grant universities, many state pork associations, the National Pork Producers Council, the National Pork Board, and agencies of the USDA. Over half of the land-grant universities in the U.S., including Virginia Tech, are partners with the USPCE.

The major programs of the USPCE include: 1) Coordination of research on focused issues and development of research priorities in important areas such as environmental stewardship, 2) A Swine Science Online program that will provide intensive swine production education and will produce the first ever undergraduate minor in swine science, and 3) The Pork Information Gateway (PIG), a virtual center of information development, warehousing and delivery involving all disciplines and the entire pork extension network nationwide.

PIG has hundreds of fact sheets, “how-to”, and other publications, covering all areas of pork production. A key difference between these publications and others that you may find on the web, however, is that all PIG publications must stand the rigors of scientific peer-review prior to appearance on the web-site. For example, I just authored a fact sheet concerning anestrus in swine that was reviewed for content and edited by scientists from the University of Illinois and the University of Missouri. PIG also allows the submission of questions for swine specialists to address.

If you are searching the web for information on pork production, I encourage you to check out the USPCE’s website. To fully access PIG you will have to register, but it only takes a few minutes and is absolutely free.

References

Estienne, M.J. and A.F. Harper. 2007. Raising hogs in the information age. Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Virginia Pork Industry Conference, Franklin, VA, pages 3-9. (available at: http://www.ext.vt.edu/news/periodicals/livestock/aps-07_03/aps-306.html)