

Demonstrating the U.S. Pork Producer Commitment to Animal Welfare

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■ Introduction

Pork producers are fully supportive of adding to the scientific knowledge about swine welfare. The National Pork Board (NPB) adopted a position statement on animal welfare guidelines for pork producers:

“Animal welfare guidelines developed without a sound scientific basis puts the welfare of the animal and the sustainability of the producer’s operation at risk. Therefore, the National Pork Board continues to support sound science as the only basis for animal welfare guideline decision-making.” January, 2002

The Checkoff Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) implements this position through using producer Checkoff funds to review the science of animal welfare, to relate that science to production practices and to inform producers about the latest, scientifically sound swine husbandry practices that can be implemented on the farm. The committee has representation from producers with different types and size of operations with expert advice from business and academic experts.

■ National Pork Boards’ Animal Welfare Program

The National Pork Board has a variety of educational materials available on swine welfare. All of this information can be located at www.porkboard.org. These materials provide supporting information to the pork producers’ animal welfare program. The *Swine Care Handbook* consists of five chapters: (1) animal practices, animal husbandry (2) environmental management (3) facilities, equipment (4) feeding, nutrition and (5) herd health management. Experts in their respective fields have authored each chapter with editing done

by the consensus of the Animal Welfare Committee and their expert advisors. The Pork Quality Assurance Program™ booklet contains 10 Good Production Practices or GPP's with one being GPP #8 "Provide Proper Swine Care." Additional welfare information is available in the *On Farm Euthanasia of Swine - Options For the Producer* (2001), brochures, videos on handling and transportation and welfare fact sheets.

Swine Welfare Assurance ProgramSM (SWAPSM) – Development and Content

The National Pork Board's Animal Welfare Committee started in 2000 to develop an on-farm program to objectively measure pig welfare. It is generally accepted that there are three indications of welfare that should be measured together, these are behavior, performance and health and physiology. For an accurate picture of welfare, all three measures must be assessed.

The Committee wanted an objective, comprehensive measure of welfare, which would allow the welfare of the gestation sow housed in all types and sizes of farm to be measured. National and international experts from the fields of veterinary and animal science helped in developing a Swine Welfare Indexing SystemSM. These experts covered physiology, behavior, production, veterinary medicine, housing, handling and stockmanship / training. In addition, three areas of the farm were identified for welfare assessment:

- farm records
- the animals directly
- the facilities

The experts and the AWC identified a total of 43 measures of welfare for inclusion into the Index.

The Swine Welfare Indexing System was field tested over 2001 through early 2002 by experts in the fields of veterinary and animal science. The testing ensured that the Index was applicable to all production systems - independent of the system's size or type of housing and that the measures of welfare identified provided an objective and accurate picture.

The Committee reviewed the results from the Swine Welfare Indexing System and concluded that this Index needed to be expanded to cover all phases of production and developed the concepts and measures into the Swine Welfare Assurance Program (SWAPSM). It is a voluntary educational and assessment program, which is producer implementable. SWAP was field tested in 2002 by veterinary, swine extension and animal science experts to ensure that it was objective and that it could apply to all housing types or operation sizes.

SWAP addresses production in two phases:

- gilts, sows, boars and neonatal piglets
- nursery and finisher pigs.

The SWAP program references other National Pork Board related material, PQA Level III (2001), On Farm Euthanasia of Swine - Options For the Producer (2001) and the Swine Care Handbook (2003). SWAP consists of nine Cares and Well-being Principles (CWPs), which can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Swine welfare assurance program care and well-being principles

| Area | Care and Well-Being Principles | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Record Keeping | 1 | Herd Health and Nutrition |
| | 2 | Caretaker Training |
| Animal Observation. | 3 | Animal Observation |
| | 4 | Body Condition Score |
| | 5 | Euthanasia |
| | 6 | Handling and Movement |
| Facilities | 7 | Facilities |
| | 8 | Emergency Support |
| | 9 | Continuing Assessment and Education |

To help producers implement the SWAP and have their sites undergo assessments, Certified SWAP EducatorsSM (CSE) will be trained through 2003. Each Educator will attend a one-day workshop and pass an exam. CSE's must apply for training, being held to a set of qualifications:

Being a veterinarian or, Extension personnel or Ag Educator who has a working knowledge and familiarity with pork production and adult education or swine production training, including:

- B.S. Animal Science or equivalent and
- Two years of recent documentable swine production experience
- Pass examination given at a SWAP Educator training session

For a site to become a SWAP Certified Site, an initial assessment must be completed by a CSE. For the site to remain SWAP certified, this process must be repeated every three years. However, frequent, internal assessments of the

records, animals and facilities will provide a clearer picture of the sites animal welfare status.

Multiple benefits can be achieved from participating in the SWAP program. It will provide a voluntary, uniform, producer-developed tool to help maintain market availability or open up new marketing avenues. It can help producers evaluate and track animal performance and welfare over time. SWAP can identify weaknesses in management, nutrition or health programs before they become welfare and production problems and finally it demonstrates the U.S. pork producers' commitment to the welfare of their animals.

■ **National Pork Board Positions Statement on the Swine Welfare Assurance Program**

Because SWAP is producer implementable and provides an objective on-farm assessment of animal welfare, it can serve as a valid, defensible and cost-effective alternative to third-party audits.

In November 2003, the National Pork Board adopted the following position statement on SWAP:

The Swine Welfare Assurance Program is the science-based, implementable and sustainable industry standard for assuring the welfare of pigs of all ages on the farm.

The National Pork Board calls on all producers to continue to address the welfare needs of their animals by participating in the Swine Welfare Assurance Program.

The National Pork Board is committed to the continued refinement of SWAP as a tool for providing customers with a credible, science-based assurance that U.S. pork producers are addressing the welfare needs of their animals.

■ **Conclusion**

Producers take pride in providing proper care for swine on their farms. The Pork Checkoff Animal Welfare Committee works alongside advisors who are swine welfare experts to base their decisions on defensible and sound science. The swine industry is responding to welfare demands in multiple ways. National Pork Board has educational tools, funds swine welfare research and is formulating a nationally recognized welfare program (SWAP) that all producers can participate in. SWAP will help demonstrate the U.S. pork producers' continual commitment to the welfare of their animals.