Electronic Sow Feeding Enhances Nutrition and Productivity at Tennessee Hog Farm

Henry, Tennessee - An advanced feeding system designed to provide individualized nutrition is helping a western Tennessee sow operation achieve high performance in animal health and production.

For Herrondale Sow Farm, a 6,000 sow farrow-to-wean operation located in Henry, Tenn., the Electronic Sow Feeding (ESF) system supports the goal of providing a constant supply of high quality pigs for the finishing system. The operation is part of Tosh Farms, a family-owned business involved in crop and swine production and transportation.

With ESF, sows are identified by an RFID (radio frequency identification) tag. When the animal enters the computerized feeding station, the system recognizes her RFID tag and automatically dispenses the feed ration specific to her nutritional needs - similar to a bar code that is scanned on consumer products. Sows enter the system one at a time. A feed bowl comes out and feed is dispensed, then retracts when she finishes and she exits from the feeder.

“We like the individual nutrition and the flexibility to feed each sow as an individual,” said Jim Maggart, regional sow supervisor for Tosh Farms. “We put a strong emphasis on body conditioning, which allows us to optimize the litter size. The sows intake more feed in the farrowing house, which allows us to produce good, strong vigorous litters at weaning.”

According to Jeff Schoening, technical sales manager for Automated Production Systems (AP), provider of the operation’s 41 ESF feeders, Electronic Sow Feeding is the only feeding method that provides true individual animal nutrition to maximize performance and sow comfort in a group housing setting.

“There are other systems that feed sows in pens, but they are fed as groups, so there is a risk that not all of the sows will get their fair share,” he explains. “With ESF, the sow comes into the feeder, she has the opportunity to eat what is programmed for her feed that day, and to eat without any other animals disturbing her or stealing it away.”

The ESF system also supports other computer-controlled functions important to the management of individual sows. These include monitoring the correct timing for vaccinations and ultrasonic pregnancy exams, as well as heat detection for sows that are not yet pregnant. Animal movement within the barn can also be tracked.

Flexible design is another important benefit of the AP ESF system. Schoening said pens can have one feeder or multiple feeders depending on the number of sows in the pens. Pen layout allows feeders to be spread out along the alley for maximum sow throughput or grouped together to allow sows to be funneled into a common alley and directed past heat detection stations. “Sows have a sleeping area and eating area and the ability to get to the feeder any time of day,” he added.

Latest technology

Although ESF is not a new concept, recent technology enhancements have greatly expanded the system’s capabilities to improve efficiency. “The mini-server that operates the ESF is very intuitive, with icons producers can click to access different parts of the feeder and adjust feeder settings,” Schoening explained.

The system also includes hand-held computers that support remote access, allowing producers to identify individual sows and modify their diet, as well as run other management software. AP uses remote access to help train producers and their employees on using the system, as well as to make recommendations for settings and help troubleshoot any problems.

Herrondale Sow Farm is one of two operations in the Tosh nine-farm system that use ESF. “Every farm we have is very productive, but the Herrondale farm is the top farm in the Tosh system, producing 32.2 pigs per sow per year mated, and that’s world class production,” Maggart said. “We are very proud of that and give the ESF a lot of credit for the goals we have achieved.”

Maggart said also ESF provides a personal connection with the animals. “All of my employees are very in tune to treating the animals properly and having respect for them. We love our pigs and they love us back, and it pays off. A happy pig is a productive pig, and our pigs are very happy and they are very productive.”

ABOUT AP

AP (Automated Production Systems) has been a proven and dependable global manufacturer of swine production equipment since 1988. AP is committed to solving the problems of today’s swine producers by providing forward thinking solutions that maximize production efficiencies. Together with our network of local dealers, AP has the experience to design and build a system to fit the needs of your operation. AP offers a full-line of feed storage and delivery, watering, ventilation, environmental controls and alarm systems. AP is a part of GSI, a global brand of AGCO (NYSE: AGCO).

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