

## Herd Health

Livestock husbandry has always been an art. Today many producers are moving into sustainable-type production systems designed to reduce animal stress and benefit the environment. At the same time, their markets and/or their philosophy may exclude antibiotics and synthetic chemical wormers. It's a situation of big potential rewards and big risks.

PFI research cooperators have worked on these questions for several years. 2002 saw the continuation of trials on management of parasites (below), an evaluation of *Salmonella* bacteria in sustainable swine systems (to be reported in the future), and a growing consensus on swine health issues.

PFI is a partner in the Pork Niche Market Working Group (PNMWG). This group includes producers, processors, marketers, and consumers and their organizations, all of them interested in developing the infrastructure and producer base for value-added kinds of pork. One of the work teams of the PNMWG, the Herd Health and Production Issues Team, has identified production barriers in alternative systems. Farmer members of the team emphasized that the early life of the pig is a delicate stage, especially during winter, when young pigs are indoors. Illness at this point can wipe out profitability. Diagnosis is often unclear, and cause is hard to determine.

Members of the Herd Health team agreed that farmers, field veterinarians, and ISU scientists will have to work closely together to solve the problem. They recruited a widely diverse group of players in the pork industry to propose a three-year project to upgrade the skills and understanding of producers and scientists alike. In the spring of 2003 that proposal was granted funding by the USDA SARE Program (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education). Expect to hear more about this *research alliance*.



Kevin Edberg of Cooperative Development Services raises a point at a meeting of the Pork Niche Market Working Group (PNMWG)