

Oats in Swine Rations

Oats has long been an important ration ingredient for small pigs, where the fiber helps prevent diarrhea. However, the high fiber in oats reduces the energy density to about 80 percent that of corn. But oat prices are usually a fraction of those for corn, so the question is "Do oats have a place in the finishing ration?" From 2001 to 2003 three PFI cooperators compared rations with and without oats or containing different levels of oats.

Figure 6 shows the value per pig after feed costs for **Wayne and Ruth Fredericks** (Osage), **Dan and Lorna and Colin and Carla Wilson** (Paullina), and **Paul and Karen Mugge** (Sutherland). In each case, adding oats to the ration decreased the return after feed cost, even if the cost of oats was set at zero. You would expect that if the oats were cheap enough, the value of pigs on the oat ration would equal that of pigs on the no-oat ration. That is the clear message in ISU Extension bulletin PM-1994, Feeding Small Grains to Swine

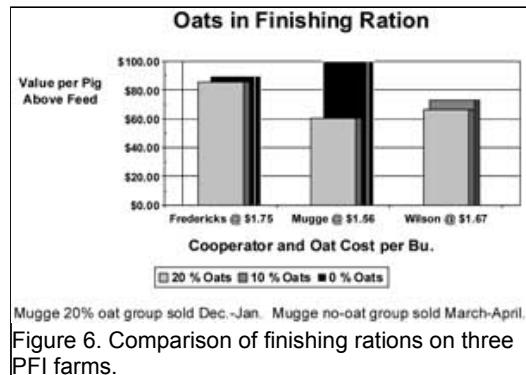


Figure 6. Comparison of finishing rations on three PFI farms.

(www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1994.pdf), which notes that "Oats can compose up to 20 to 40% of the diet of growing-finishing swine." However, the bulletin also notes that this was based on a trial of high-test weight oats, and that "Test weight differences may account for the variability in pig performance found among oat feeding trials." This explanation isn't totally satisfactory in this case; pigs could have eaten more to compensate for the lower energy density of the oat feed, yet feed efficiency was similar between groups on each farm. Sometimes research raises more questions than it answers.