

# **USING ELECTRONIC SORTERS TO HANDLE LARGE GROUPS OF GROWING PIGS**

**Ron Janmaat  
R J Enterprises  
R.R. #2  
Seaforth, ON N0K 1W0  
(519) 522-2060**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the past, pigs were grouped in pens of 30 or fewer. Today it is common to have pens with as many as 500 to 1000 with electronic sorters. The advantages of electronic sorters include labour savings, higher carcass index to increase income, and increased efficiency with more pigs in the same barn space.

## **PRODUCTION**

Barn costs in systems with large group housing are lower because of the need for less penning. More pigs can be housed in a given space because of the lack of penning and hallways. Pig health in large pens is about the same as small pens but, with large groups, morbidity is about half. Aggression is not a problem, even when adding pigs to large groups, since timid pigs can easily escape their aggressors. As a result, tail biting is uncommon in these systems. Sorting pigs for market is simplified, since pigs are used to moving around and interacting with people, so there is less stress on the pigs.

## **DAY TO DAY CHORES**

Housing pigs in large groups requires routine checks, which means entering the pen and walking amongst the pigs daily. However, checking drinkers and feeders takes less time in large pens compared to barns with small pens. You will also have pigs following you as you walk through the pigs. Lamé and sick pigs should be pulled out and treated but when they have recovered, they can easily be returned to the large pen.

## **BARN LAYOUT AND SORTING IN LARGE GROUPS**

Sorting hogs for market in large groups requires two to three (or more) people or an electronic sorter. There are two types of layouts:

- 1) Swing gate barn, where feeders and drinkers are placed throughout the barn. This is like a conventional barn with 25-30 pigs per pen with gates in each wall so pigs can go from pen

to pen without going in the hallway. A sorter is put in the hallway or offset. Pigs are forced down the barn and through the scale, which takes time and labour.

- 2) Kitchen style, the more common layout, where pigs go through the scale to get to feed and water. The pigs then go back out through one-way gates to a common sleeping area. With this layout you can use the sorter to feed two or three different diets at the same time to improve pig performance. This layout allows you to monitor average daily gains, project hog marketings on a daily basis if needed, and monitor health problems. Light pigs at the end of a batch can be added to another batch if necessary. Training pigs in a kitchen style layout is very straightforward, if barns are laid out properly.

### **Equipment Required**

Regardless of the system used, the essential components of a sorter system include an electronic scale, one-way gates and an air compressor. Just as with barns with small pens, pull-out pens are needed to house sick or poor-doing pigs in large group systems.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Electronic sorters are becoming a standard for marketing hogs in today's market. All sorters will sort hogs, but you need one that sorts accurately.