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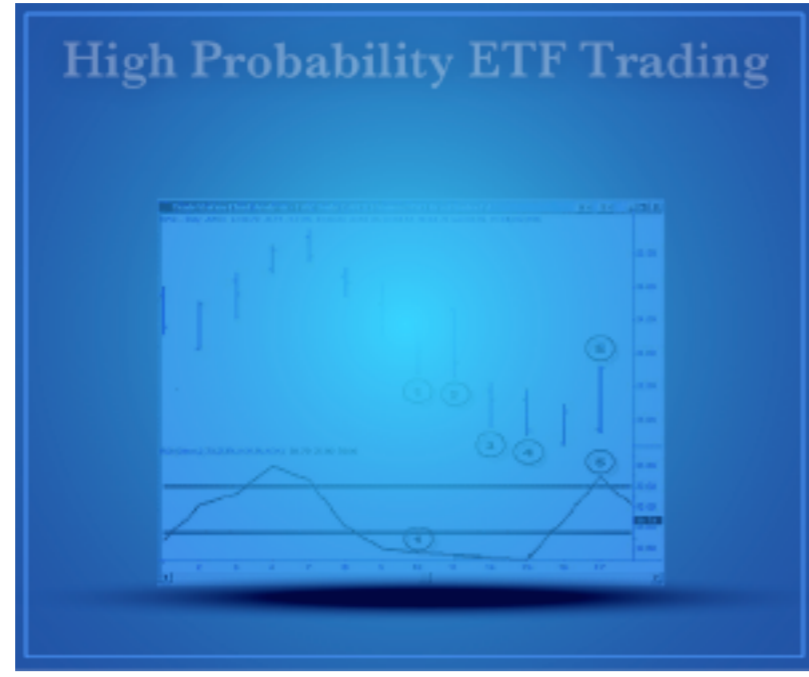
Smithfield delays replacing cramped stalls for pregnant pigs

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Jun 24, 2009 (The Virginian-Pilot - McClatchy-Tribune Information Services via COMTEX) -- SFD | [Quote](#) | [Chart](#) | [News](#) | [PowerRating](#) -- Smithfield Foods Inc. will delay its program to phase out "gestation stalls" for pregnant pigs because of the company's financial losses, Smithfield said in an annual report released today.



Smithfield, the nation's largest [pork](#) processor and producer, announced in January 2007 that it would replace the cramped gestation stalls with group housing for the pigs over the next decade.

Animal rights groups praised the company for the move. They said the gestation crates lead to higher rates of mortality and greater risk of disease and depression for pigs. Bruce Friedrich, vice president of policy for PETA, called the decision "a fantastic step for farmed animal welfare."

In the annual report, Smithfield said it probably would not meet the 2017 deadline because of "significant operating losses incurred by our hog production segment." Last week, the company reported its first annual loss -- of \$190 million -- since 1975. Its hog-production business alone lost

\$171 million in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2009.

Smithfield, in the report, said it has already converted to "group housing" at three farms in North Carolina, Colorado and Utah.

The transition to group pens will cost about \$300 million, the report said.

"We have delayed capital expenditures for the program such that we no longer expect to complete the phaseout within 10 years of the original announcement," Smithfield said. "However, we remain committed to implementing the program as soon as economic conditions improve."

Friedrich, from PETA, said today, "It's not surprising that when times get tough they jettisoned a plan that was barely a plan in the first place."

Friedrich noted that PETA at the time asked Smithfield to extend the gestation-crate phaseout to its suppliers and to provide more details about the transition. The company, he said, did not respond to either request.

"If you're eating [meat](#)" from Smithfield, Friedrich said, "you are supporting cruelty that would revolt you if you saw it."

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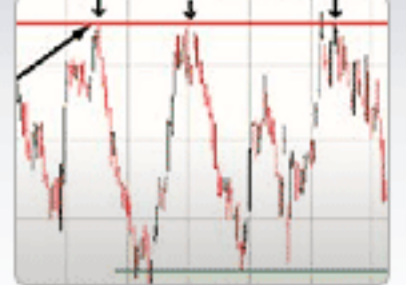
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