
Smithfield Foods Makes Landmark Decision Regarding Animal Management

- In Conjunction with Its Customers, Smithfield Moves to Using Group Pens for Housing Pregnant Sows -

SMITHFIELD, Va., Jan. 25 /PRNewswire/ -- Smithfield Foods, Inc. announced today that it is beginning the process of phasing out individual gestation stalls at all of its company-owned sow farms and replacing them with pens-or group housing-over the next 10 years. Smithfield also will work with its contract growers regarding system conversion.

"Working with our customers, who have made their views known on the issue of gestation stalls, we are pleased to be taking this precedent-setting step," said C. Larry Pope, chief executive officer of Smithfield Foods. "During our 70 years in business we have always been sensitive to the concerns and needs of our customers, and they have told us they feel group housing is a more animal-friendly form of sow housing."

"While this will be a significant financial commitment for our company over the next 10 years, we believe it's the right thing to do," said Pope.

Gestation stalls and group housing are methods used by hog producers to house pregnant sows. The sows are kept in these facilities during their pregnancies, which last about 16 weeks, to closely monitor their progress.

In making the decision to convert from gestation stalls to group housing, Pope pointed out that "our decision acknowledges that extensive research into sow housing has concluded both gestation stalls and group pens provide for the well-being of pregnant sows and work equally well from a production standpoint. There is no scientific consensus on which system is superior, and we do not endorse one management system over the other."

Smithfield also based its decision to adopt the group housing system on initial results of its own three-year study into sow housing. The company has been researching penning systems at some of its hog farms in North Carolina. The second year of the study has been completed, and preliminary results indicate that, with proper management, group housing arrangements are equally as good as gestation stalls in providing proper care for pregnant sows.

"Existing expert research, along with our own findings, has led us to conclude that switching from gestation stalls to group pens will not have a detrimental effect on our animals or the way we run our business," said Dennis Treacy, Smithfield's vice president of environmental and corporate affairs.

"Group housing does present some challenges, and we don't have all the answers at this time," Treacy said. "But that's why we have given ourselves 10 years to convert our company-owned farms to group pens. Additional research will provide the information we need."

A number of industry experts have concluded that the most important factors in providing for the welfare of animals are the husbandry and management skills of the people running the operation. "We agree with that assessment, and we're confident that our employees have the necessary skills to successfully make the conversion to group housing," Treacy said.

"The welfare of our animals has always been a priority for us, and that is why Murphy-Brown, our hog production subsidiary, created its Animal Welfare Management System (AWMS)," Treacy said. "Our AWMS includes practices designed to monitor animal well-being at all stages of the animal's life through a series of checklists, inspections and audits."

Smithfield Foods has delivered a 24 percent average annual compounded rate of return to investors since 1975. With sales of \$11 billion, Smithfield is the leading processor and marketer of fresh pork and processed meats in the United States, as well as the largest producer of hogs. For more information, visit <http://www.smithfieldfoods.com>.

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