

Rethinking Markets for Hoop Barns and Bedded Livestock Systems



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September 14, 2004



The historic promise of marketing hogs

“Hog marketing has paid off the mortgage, has increased the value of the land, paid the farms’ running expenses and paid for untold necessities and luxuries for the American people.” (Evans, *Hogology*, 1918).

But the problem of marketing hogs....

“It is difficult to understand why the pork industry—the producer *and* the packer *and* the retailer—pays such small heed to the first law of marketing, which is: Make what people want to buy; don’t try to sell what you happen to make.”
(Twedt, in *The Pork Industry: Problems and Progress*, 1968).

So how *should* we think about markets for hoop systems?

1. Think more sociologically about markets
2. Recognize the complicating influence of non-commercial values in food markets
3. Anticipate the growing importance of animal welfare in consumer decisions about meat purchases and consumption

Think of markets as social, not simply economic

- Markets are not abstract or universal phenomena
- In market encounters, people are not always “rational” optimizers of their own utility
- Markets are always situated in social contexts
- Markets are about more than money!!

Some specifics from hoop production

- “Pluriactivity” of many farm families conditions market options
- “Bricolage” in hog production systems of many hoop users may constrain ability to market product as hoops based

Growing importance of non-economic values in food markets

- Basic consumer values surrounding price persist
- But evidence other less quantified values now also matter: environment, health, aesthetics, regional/sustainable development, taste, animal welfare, food safety

Some specifics relevant to hoop production

- Efforts to identify what values are most salient for certain consumer segments (Leopold Center studies on eco-labeling; Pork Niche Market Working Group)
- Research on motivations, values and concerns of farmers using hoop structures
- How do consumers and producers match up?

The animal welfare angle

- Concern more widespread and formalized in Europe, but growing in U.S.
- Animal welfare benefits as the competitive advantage of hoop production?
- A system that potentially moves humans from position of control to more collaboration with livestock animals

Hoop houses and happy hogs

“The pigs are happy in there. I don’t see the pigs outside very often, but they’re always running around in there, you know, barking and stuff, just running around being happy. Yeah, hogs kinda bark or woof or whatever. And those pigs in there, they get wound up and they run around, and they’ll chase you all over the place in there, follow you around as soon as you’re in there. They’re like, *on* you. I think they’re happier. Yeah, I would be living there.”

Hoop houses and happy hogs

“I think it’s good for their mental health, if you want to call it that. Not their mental health, but their... I don’t know what the proper word is. But their sense of being an animal or something. You know, I look at those confinement buildings that we have, and I think that’s not really how they were meant to be. You know, that isn’t how... God put them together or whatever. And I think a pig can be himself in a hoop building versus a confinement building. A pig can be a pig, instead of what we want him to be.”

Market approach and animal welfare

- Most hoop producers identify animal welfare benefits of system
- Niche market producers also note direct economic benefits associated with animal welfare gains
- Conventional market producers personally value animal welfare gains, but experience few economic rewards from them

