

Pork Industry Remembers Who Rules In This Market

BY RITA BRHEL
 P&D Correspondent

According to an interview by Brownfield Ag News, the U.S. pork industry is surprised by the fast-food restaurant chain McDonald's recent decision to transition its pork supply away from producers who use conventional sow gestation stalls. It's a choice that McDonald's had a little help on from the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

HSUS is the group that is notorious for turning public opinion against conventional livestock production practices in a number of states that now have a lawful ban on poultry cages and pig crates. Some states, like Nebraska and Ohio, have wized up and now have anti-HSUS groups of their own; in Nebraska, the group is called "We Support Ag" and is coordinated by the Nebraska Cattlemen. That's probably why HSUS is taking the back-door approach, using McDonald's as its mouthpiece.

Regardless of HSUS's tactics, this is a decision that would've surely come sooner than later anyway. Consumers are increasingly becoming more vocal in their desire to eat food from livestock that is humanely raised, regardless of their support of animal welfare groups. It's part of the local foods movement — consumers feel empowered in being able to choose what kind of food, whether local or not, organic or not, naturally raised or not, humanely raised or not specified, that they wish.

It was consumer demand that changed the way nearly all fast-food restaurants do business. Take Wendy's, for example, which seems at the forefront of the changing

fast-food menu — apple-pecan salads and sour cream-chive baked potatoes deviate from the usual hamburger/French fry lineup, and if you're looking for something a little more typical, their fries still have potato skin on them and are

seasoned with sea salt. Wendy's didn't arbitrarily change their menu; just as with any business that wants to be successful, the business paid attention to who is buying their food — the consumers.

So, even without a push from HSUS, McDonald's has probably been hearing its consumers demand humanely raised food. HSUS just gives momentum, and direction, to go through with the decision. Whether it was solely McDonald's choice, or a joint decision with HSUS, I'm sure there is a great base of consumers happy about it. The majority of the U.S. population is so removed from agriculture that they have to be told that grocery stores don't make the milk they sell.

I find it funny that the National Pork Board would be surprised by McDonald's decision. Perhaps, they're more surprised by McDonald's alliance with HSUS? Regardless, this is a decision that is likely to have big consequences industry-wide. McDonald's a big enough name that other major buyers of pork are likely to follow suit, plus McDonald's buying power alone is big enough to demand a major change in the industry.

It looks like the beginning of a change for conventional pork producers. Not only will they be forced to change their production practices in order to stay in business, but they're also being reminded of who is really the boss in their industry — the consumer.



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Making Hay Year-Round

For Crofton Man, Hay Is In His Trucking Blood

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
 P&D Correspondent

Dennis Kleinschmit of Crofton, Neb., makes hay all year round — either by baling or selling it.

It all started back in the 1960s. Kleinschmit can still remember helping his dad, Donald Kleinschmit, get a load of hay ready to truck when he was still in grade school.

"We all grew up working with dad and eventually spent time in the trucking business with him," said Kleinschmit. He was given a framed photo last Christmas by his son taken maybe 30 years ago or longer, of some of the brothers and their dad in front of one of their trucks. It included Dennis, Gehard, Donald, Mike and Donovan, toasting each other with happy smiles of success. Brother Norman was missing the day the photo was taken or maybe he was taking the shot but he was never as involved in the trucking business as the rest of his siblings. Together they ran four to five trucks and kept a steady business.

When Donald died in 1993 and the brothers went on their own, they realized very few of dad's original customers were left. But over the years, by word of mouth, their reputation kept the hay hauling business successful.

"We learned from Dad if we treated our customers right and were honest with them, they would come back," said Kleinschmit. "Dad gave us a good start and we worked well together." It doesn't mean he won't cuss his brothers once in a while but that's just being brothers.

Today, things are a little different. Kleinschmit said after the death of his brother Gehard and nephew Jason in a trucking accident about 11 years ago, the Kleinschmit Brothers were advised to split the family business up in order to protect their families.

"We pretty much run our own hay businesses now," said Kleinschmit. They cover about the same contact area with a 700-mile radius and it's not unusual to find Kleinschmit in Texas where he has several repeat customers.

"Of course, some of my best customers are in the dairy industry, small family farmers in Illinois running 300-head herds," said Kleinschmit. He has 10-12 steady customers out east where he usually hauls two loads month. Some local feed lots in Iowa prefer round bales and he delivers several loads to them.

In addition, Kleinschmit has several ranchers in Texas who love the best hay for their beloved horses. They prefer small squares but handling the small bundles of alfalfa went out when



PHOTO: LINDA WUEBBEN

Hay is a big part of the life of Dennis Kleinschmit of Crofton, Neb. When he's now growing it, he's hauling it, keeping alive a family tradition.

large square bales came rolling into the alfalfa fields. He admitted there would be better money in the small squares but they are too labor-intensive and time-consuming to handle.

Kleinschmit only farms 40 acres himself, so he finds his alfalfa from area farmers who sell it in the windrow. He goes into the field and bales it when it is right for his customers. Sometimes when the weather threatens a crop, he may call brother Mike and hire him to help him bale so the crop gets put up at the right time.

"We don't leave each other hanging, we're only a phone call away from each other," said Kleinschmit.

When the brothers split up the business, he decided to lease a truck to his son-in-law, Nick Fiscus, and they keep busy with hay all year round. Between the two of them they haul 50-60 loads each a year, sometimes traveling together and sometimes splitting up. Fiscus also works with some farmers near Meckling to find hay to harvest.

When the truck hits the road, the log book dictates the driving time and for every 11 hours on, a trucker has to be 10 hours off, Kleinschmit said. Their trucks are equipped with sleepers so they have a place to rest. The other aspect of their operation which keeps them above the red ink line is the back-hauls they are able to acquire. They have hauled anything from steel, posts and rail-

road ties back from wherever so they aren't driving back to Nebraska empty.

"We have made several contacts over the years and when we know we are headed somewhere, we call them up and see if they have anything we can back-haul to the area," Kleinschmit said. "That keeps the price of hay down for the dairyman or whoever we're delivering it to."

From season to season, Kleinschmit knows he needs a little more than 1,000 tons of hay to keep his customers happy depending on how successful the crop year is. Baling hay has come a long way over the years and the equipment has made it an easier job to do. Large square bales can be handled with a tractor and loader and stacked more compactly on a semi-trailer for a better legal load.

The shedding of hay is a big improvement in the industry also. The first shed Kleinschmit built on his farm 30 years ago was one

of the first in the area. Before that it was unheard of to shed the crop but farmers finally realized covers and tarps were not feasible. Even today, none of the alfalfa hits the ground after it is baled. All of the harvested crop is placed on pallets inside his buildings.

"We used to be gone for weeks with Dad but now the trips are shorter," said Kleinschmit. "Another advantage is we go when we want. If the weather is crappy, we can wait out the storm."

Kleinschmit can see the writing on the wall though. Hay brokers are becoming more popular and there is a lot of competition. His truck is five years old and the mileage meter reads around 650,000. He wonders if its time to trade and what the future holds.

"I was gone a lot when my girls were young and I missed a lot," said Kleinschmit. "It's a little better now, and I'm glad my grandchildren will get to see their dad more."

NFU's Beginning Farmer Institute Now Accepting Applications

WASHINGTON — National Farmers Union (NFU) encourages individuals who are contemplating starting a career in farming or ranching to apply for the Beginning Farmer Institute. The program is also open to those across the nation who have just begun farming or are in the process of transferring an operation from a parent, relative, or non-relative.

Beginning farmers and ranchers face a seemingly unlimited number of decisions to make, from drawing up a business plan and arranging financing to learning what programs are available to make it easier to start up and sustain a successful operation.

"This program will answer the questions new farmers have, and more importantly share our expertise to answer questions that people do not always think of asking when they begin farming," said NFU President Roger Johnson. "The Beginning Farmer Institute underscores our commitment to growing family agriculture."

Applicants accepted into the 2012 program will attend three separate education sessions, to be held in April in Washington, D.C., November in Minneapolis, Minn.,

and at the NFU Convention in March 2013 in Springfield, Mass. Program topics will cover business planning, understanding U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, tax and record keeping, and marketing.

A registration fee is required for accepted candidates. The NFU Foundation will cover the costs of materials, transportation, and lodging. This program is supported by the NFU Foundation, Farm Credit and CHS Foundation.

To apply, visit www.nfu.org/education, fill out the form and return it by the March 14 deadline.

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