

Supporting Vermont's Swine Industry

WLEF Final Report
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Deliverables progress:

1. Build a database of Vermont swine producers through existing workshops, social media, phone conversations, farmer word of mouth, etc.
As of July, 2016 there are 117 listserv members.
2. Use that database to establish centralized communication methods (as identified as preferable by participants).
To date, email/listserv has been desirable as identified through general conversations. vtswine@list.uvm.edu was populated in early February, 2015. Currently 117 members on the list. Listserv outreach is ongoing through swine events and general livestock events, such as the Vermont Farm Show.
3. Develop pre-

Approximately 264 attendees have attended these events, from five Northeast States. Assuming some overlap in attendance and multiple attendees from the same farm, this represents roughly 130 farm businesses. Additionally, direct farmer assistance was provided at 7 farms in August 2015, representing approximately 35 breeding sows and 580+ feeder pigs on the days we visited. The farms were in Addison, Chittenden, Windsor, Windham, Lamoille, and Caledonia counties.

5. Develop written and electronic materials for distribution through events and online opportunities.
Discussion through the swine advisory committee has led to identification of informational needs. Fact sheets and other materials will be developed in preparation of spring/summer events.

General feedback through swine-related events has been that farmers are not looking for new fact sheets or quick materials; they are much more interested in one-on-one technical assistance and personal visits or workshops.

6. Use post-event surveys to identify further areas of educational need and new issues as they arise through discussion.

Some comments about further areas of educational need collected after the swine intensive day included:

I would love to attend a farrowing specific class or one that focuses on pigs diet and how to supplement protein

Provide brief background summary which outlines the initial purpose of the project. Please include the specific need that was addressed.

Vermont's swine industry has been growing, as consumer demand for locally raised pork and specialty products like sausage have increased. Purchased-grain alternatives such as brewers' or distillers' grains, apple pressings, and whey are all being investigated as potential feed sources for hogs; utilizing waste products from Vermont's other growing food industries to produce an in-demand product more profitably. These indicators point to increased farmer opportunity.

One challenge for swine producers is establishing connections between farrowing operations, finishing markets (particularly on a year-round basis), and shared technical assistance for production. Some farrowing farms have trouble finding piglet buyers and some farmers with direct markets are challenged to find the right kind of piglets at the right time to satisfy their processing dates and customers.

Briefly summarize activities performed and tasks performed during the grant period. Describe the work accomplished in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Include significant results, accomplishments, conclusions and recommendations. Include favorable or unusual developments.

Activities and tasks performed during the grant period included on-farm and in-classroom workshops; development of networking opportunities for swine producers; direct technical assistance; producer needs survey(s) to capture current and future needs; and educational materials development.

Eight on-farm, classroom and conference workshops were offered in order to deliver technical information as well as create opportunities for farmers to interact and build stronger relationships. Workshops ranged from three-hours at a farm site to full-day conference sessions with multiple speakers.

An informational web page and VT-SWINE listserv were developed to encourage continued sharing of information. Topics discussed on the listserv have included biosecurity (PEDv) concerns, swine housing, bedding materials, shared purchases/trucking of equipment, piglets for sale, and state regulations.

While not a direct deliverable at the outset, a group of swine producers self-identified as serious business owners were included in direct technical assistance visits by a Swine Specialist with University of Missouri Extension. Seven farms were visited in five counties with sizes ranging from 8 to 350 feeder pigs and 3 to 15 breeding sows.

An electronic survey was distributed through the swine listserv with questions about animal numbers, labor, marketing methods, production systems, nutrition, and areas of need. Most use rotated or dedicated pasture, some use wood lots, and a small number use traditional barns. None of the respondents use slatted-floor systems.

Additional needs for professional development include reproduction and breeding, particularly artificial insemination; nutrition balancing on pasture; reducing costs of production; and market stability/managing growth.

Please highlight any major milestones that demonstrate the project achievements (based on your goals and outcomes template as defined in your grant agreement). Include: jobs, sales, total people worked with, and/or total hours of technical assistance provided.

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In addition to building local technical expertise and a network of producers (117 members of the VTSWINE listserv, for example), work under this project has increased the base of technical expertise outside of the state. Significant swine producing states such as Ohio, Missouri and Michigan have Extension Swine Specialists with different areas of expertise. From previous activities and projects, contacts in areas of genetics, carcass quality, and nutrition have been developed. This project allowed much more in-depth breeding and reproduction education.

Please provide insight into the lessons learned as a result of completing this project. Illustrate the positive and negative results of the project. Provide unexpected outcomes or results that were an effect of implementing this project.

Some of the greatest perspective on the whole project was captured within the mid-project producer survey. According to the survey conducted in 2015 (n=18), the number of pigs managed by respondents ranged from 0 to 230. The number of hours per week needed to manage the pigs ranged from 4 to 40. The number of people involv

difficult to capture long-lasting change or resulting trends. Offering workshops and technical assistance are activities that can be quickly delivered, however when livestock are involved, farm management changes can take much longer than one or two years to take effect, and results may be experienced much longer than that.

Finally, there is a distinction between fewer, larger Vermont swine farms growing for wholesale markets, and more, smaller farms who direct sell. The transition between small and large can be difficult and not all farms seek to grow. The project partners struggled with the question of whether to focus energy on the needs of the larger farmers (supporting more pigs) or encourage scaling up of smaller producers (more farmers).

Please describe how the public benefited, directly or indirectly, from this project's activities. (b) (5) - DPP