



Researcher working with a producer.
Source: Doug Richards, Prairie Swine Centre

Comprehensive and reliable information from 12 different farms with group sow housing is now available online at www.groupsowhousing.com. The project documents a wide range of herd sizes and renovation budgets, providing Canadian producers with pictures, testimonials from fellow producers, as well as other practical material about the conversion to group sow housing.

Why was this work done?

The transition from stalls to groups is gradually taking place across the country. In 2018, it was estimated that roughly 25% of the Canadian sow herd was managed using group housing. To comply with the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs (2014), it is expected that close to 100% of sows will be in group housing by 2024. This change requires major renovations to existing buildings, or replacement with new buildings, as well as significant changes to daily management. This also represents an important investment by producers. Arguably, those who have already successfully implemented group sow housing are the best resource to provide other producers with credible information on what is needed for this important transition.

What was done and what was the outcome?

This project gathered the best possible information from 12 farms where sows were housed in groups. The conversion of six barns was documented as they went through the process. Information from six sites that had already converted to group sow housing was also collected. A range of locations, feeding systems and farm sizes was sought.

The actual costs of transition reported by producers ranged from \$250 to \$500 per sow place. This was much lower than initial estimates, largely because producers did much of the work themselves and kept existing floors, feed lines, electrical and ventilation systems.

National sow housing conversion project

► Jennifer Brown, Prairie Swine Centre



ESF feeders.
Source: Doug Richards, Prairie Swine Centre



Sows using environmental enrichment at Hog-Tied Farms.
Source: Doug Richards, Prairie Swine Centre

Electronic Sow Feeders (ESF) and free-access ESF were the most common feeding systems used by the farms studied. In addition, two of the farms used competitive feeding systems. While individual feeding systems such as ESF systems may have a higher initial capital cost than competitive feeding, it has the long-term benefit of automatically tracking sows as well as potential feed cost and labour savings. In contrast, competitive systems have reduced initial costs for installation but require more floor space and daily management, with less flexibility to manage sows individually.

Collaborators

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