

## **Swine Welfare Assurance Program Continues to Grow**

After just one year, the Pork Checkoff's Swine Welfare Assurance Program<sup>SM</sup> (SWAP<sup>SM</sup>) is already making a difference in the U.S. pork industry. Since its debut in August 2003, producers have implemented the program in all types and sizes of swine operations across the country. "Sometimes you don't notice potential problems until you actually look for them," says a pork producer from Michigan. "SWAP was able to help my operation identify animal care principles that could be improved and that has now helped us to better our overall productivity."

SWAP is the first objective and voluntary on farm program to measure swine welfare. This educational assessment allows producers to evaluate and benchmark the care and welfare of their animals and address any concerns in a scientifically sound manner. The program can be implemented within any type or size of production system. Markets may eventually require assurances of animal welfare. Communications with fast food chains and retailers indicate that responsibility for such guarantees may be transferred back to the producer. SWAP can help producers answer these questions should they arise.

Not only can SWAP empower producers to demonstrate their commitment to swine welfare to their customers, many producers have found the program extremely useful in offering improvements to their production practices. "Pork producers who have participated in SWAP are realizing the value of the program," said Erik Risa, manager of certification programs for the Pork Checkoff. "SWAP is serving as a way for them to showcase their commitment to swine welfare whilst continually evaluating their production practices."

Such changes can lead to improved productivity and efficiencies for producers. Since SWAP was designed with practical guidelines, pork producers are using the program as a way to identify welfare issues before they become production problems. One producer from Minnesota said, "The Swine Welfare Assurance program has improved our operation's management practices in several areas. One area that we were initially skeptical of, but has proven quite valuable, is record keeping. Through improved daily animal observations, all daily caretakers have become more accountable. Our overall animal husbandry skills have been enhanced."

To participate in SWAP, producers review educational materials regarding welfare issues and then arrange for an assessment of their production site by a Certified SWAP Educator to be conducted. The site can then be registered with the Pork Checkoff as a SWAP Assessed site for a period of up to three years. To find a Certified SWAP Educator near you and for more information about SWAP, visit [www.porkboard.org/SWAPHome](http://www.porkboard.org/SWAPHome) or call the Pork Checkoff Service Center at 800-456-PORK.