

## **IMPACT OF OUR HOG OPERATION ON OUR FARM AND COMMUNITY**

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Our farm base is located six and a half miles southeast of Notre Dame along highway 245 to Carman. Our operation consists of 2100 acres of grain land as well as a feeder operation, which markets approximately 18,000 hogs annually. My wife Liliane and myself have been farming for 30 years on this family farm and we now farm with our three sons being fifth generation producers.

Liliane, myself as well as our three boys all attended the University of Manitoba. While I studied business management my three sons focused on agriculture and therefore have a good grasp of animal husbandry and soil science. When all three boys decided to farm we knew that expansion into the livestock sector was the only way to provide for three or more families. So began our move into the hog industry. I recall an article written by a non-farmer who stated that grain farmers should get a real job instead of working three months of the year. Well I can assure you that our operation has little time for leisure and that young hard working individuals like our three boys are a very valuable asset not only to our operation but to the community.

Our oldest son is now married and his wife originally from Miami is a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine practicing in Notre-Dame. Our second son is also married and his wife originally from Bruxelles teaches in the area. This ability to retain young people is vital to the survival and prosperity of our small rural community.

Over the years I have seen a number of projects in our community namely a new hockey arena, a new recreation hall, a new church and more recently our community

raised \$1.5 M for a new health clinic presently under construction. These projects were made possible in large part to a healthy and prosperous agricultural sector. In and around Notre-Dame, that includes grains and oilseeds, dairy, beef, as well as hogs. This hog operation also contributes to local taxes, which in turn support public services. This particular operation is contributing approximately \$6000 annually to the rural municipality and approximately \$7000 annually to the local school division. During construction it required the services of local contractors for concrete, buildings, electrical, plumbing, etc. Not to mention the ongoing services required from trades people, feed mills, etc.

So when certain individuals state that the hog industry provides little benefit to their community, think again!!

Another long-term benefit provided by our hog operation is our ability to reduce commercial fertilizer on our land. We are now able to inject manure on approximately 350 acres of grain land annually with what we consider natural material. Although the application costs are about the same as the costs of commercial fertilizer we have discovered that the manure continues to provide nutrients beyond any fertilizer we could buy and that's its slow release provides fertilizer value for two more years. That's not to mention the improved conditioning or texture of the soil. We estimate that at today's cost of nitrogen the value of this nutrient alone is upwards of \$30,000 per year. With this in mind why would we waste such a valuable resource?

Now that I have touched on some human resource and economic factors let me deal with some of the environmental issues. Our farm operation is certainly doing a better job of monitoring its grain land than we ever did before we had the hog operation. We are

now soil testing our land to twenty four inches and injecting hog manure (which is also tested for nutrients at a provincial laboratory) according to a manure management plan registered with the province, Some of the other environmental protection measures adopted in our hog operation unit include:

1. The construction of manure storage that's been lined tested and approved by Manitoba Conservation.
2. The construction of a fence around the manure storage to protect wildlife as well as protect the liner from damage.
3. The installation of four monitoring wells around the manure storage with an outside party collecting and submitting samples for analysis and reporting to Manitoba Conservation on an annual basis.
4. The application of a straw cover on an annual basis to minimize odors.
5. The planting of shelterbelts around the barn site.
6. The testing of well water on an annual basis.
7. The installation of wet/dry feeders that has reduced water consumption and manure by an estimated 20 to 25%.
8. The installation of water meters which monitor water consumption in every room in each barn.

We are presently in the process of upgrading our handling of dead stock and have applied to the National Farm Stewardship Program, for some assistance under the Environmental Farm Plan. Once we are approved we will be purchasing a cooling storage unit for this operation so that dead stock can be handled more efficiently.

In summary our hog operation has had a very positive impact on our farm and community. It is helping us to retain human resources in our community, provides economic benefits for both our farm and the community whether directly or indirectly. Although environmental issues are always a question mark we are attempting to be the best stewards of the land and provide the best possible animal care. Our farm and family has a vested interest in protecting the quality of the air and water, since we are the closest residence to the barn site. Our children and hopefully our grandchildren will be living in this environment and we plan to continue to make it as safe as reasonably possible. Why would we do otherwise?

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