

Who's taking the lead on Production Economics?

# Don't be caught unprepared: **Data** collection not optional



Although most producers will readily agree that data is important to their swine operations, few really know how important it will be in the next five years. Several factors work against good data collection and most producers fall into those practices over time.



We are in a new era of analysis and forecasting, opened up by advances in computational power and software capabilities. In order to capture the full benefit of these advances, good data collection will be an absolute necessity.



Producers may need to re-examine the quality and detail of the data they collect and how it is managed and stored for future use. **Having a 5- to 10-year historical data series will be critical as we see “big data” technologies become more common in swine production.** If you do not currently have that volume of data, begin compiling your database now so you are not caught unprepared when these new technologies inevitably become commonplace.



# Avoid these five key impediments that may cause limited or reduced record collection

## 1. Use of paper or PDF data reception forms

Many producers still receive paper receipts, kill sheets by fax and other important information digitally, but in PDF templates which either require re-entering the data (which is time-consuming and error-prone) or using optical character recognition (OCR) programs that are better than they used to be, but still imperfect.

## 2. Unwillingness to collect data

Many producers have simply stopped collecting data that they themselves would acknowledge could be potentially important. Some producers do this because they have never had the time or knowledge about how to make use of data to support current decision making. Another possibility for failure to collect data is an attempt to save time and hard drive space.

## 3. Wrong assumptions

Producers may pre-judge data as contaminated or not useful because of certain standard operating procedures or production processes used by the farm. For instance, assume you fill a wean-to-finish barn over a two-week period, when is the start date for the “group”? Since it is generally impossible to segregate pigs by date of arrival in the building, producers judge it unimportant to even keep records about subsequent (to date of first pigs in) delivery days. This is a mistake. New analytical methods can sort through these “murky” areas to provide important decision making guidance.

## 4. Maintaining central storage or inventory sites

It’s common for certain supplies and routine medications to be stored in a central storage or inventory site (which do not have federal tracking compliance requirements) and this site operates as a “pharmacy” or supply room. There is often one site per regionally grouped buildings or multi-building sites in a complex. It is common for producers to only be able to trace the use of these supplies and routine medications to the “pharmacy” location and not to the individual buildings or groups of animals to which it might have been taken for final use.

## 5. Lack of real-time reporting

Even though feed delivery is laden with recordkeeping, the actual tracking and accounting for the flow and use of feed is rarely done in “real-time.” Often, receiving some kind of paper ticket from the driver with initials from the site manager verifying the drop-off is delayed when the driver goes home for the day and/or worse, if the driver’s standard practice is to turn in tickets every few days. Think about how mortalities are accounted and the banking of alive but cull pigs upon delivery, only reporting deads after the off-inventory banked pigs are “used up” in the mortality. Turning in mortalities weekly, monthly or even at the end of the phase to balance the building inventory, are all practices which will need to be changed if companies want to gain the big advantages that new data analytics will bring to the table.

**Dennis DiPietre**  
Agricultural Economist

An award winning consultant to agricultural and food industries, Dr. DiPietre advises on innovation, precision production and marketing, cost containment, optimisation modeling and negotiation.

**Lance Mulberry**  
Agricultural Economist

Lance Mulberry is an economist with KnowledgeVentures, LLC, specialising in bio-economic modeling, which is profit optimisation in the presence of natural variation. The focus of his work is primarily on swine production, consulting with clients from around the globe in all aspects of the pork supply chain.