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Review of *Swine Source Book: Alternatives for Pork Producers* Edited by Julie Tranquilla

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Swine Source Book: Alternatives for Pork Producers. Edited by Julie Tranquilla. St. Paul: Alternative Swine Production Systems Program, University of Minnesota, 1999. Figures, tables, notes, references. \$17.50 loose-leaf binding (to order call: 1-800-876-8636).

This is a book that should be on every Ag teacher's desk in the country. Instead of espousing the factory production of hogs, the norm for the industry today, it gives alternative production techniques that should be useful to starting farmers, niche producers (including organic farmers), and anyone else who might want to raise hogs in a more ecologically sound and humane fashion.

The volume is a compilation of articles by various authors originally appearing as research papers or in magazines and journals. While each author has a different reason for presenting his or her system, all are alternatives to the present day's status quo. Many of the ideas presented are actually old production systems revised with a new twist or two. Pasture farrowing and finishing and using hogs as grazers are methods employed since Grandpa's day. Some of the newer ideas include the use of hoop structures for growing-finishing and deep bedding systems in place of total confinement finishing. There are quite a number of articles describing university studies on these two systems. In depth comparisons between such alternate methods and confinement systems are presented along with performance evaluations in regard to temperature variations.

These time-tested systems work. They are gentler on the environment and more humane on the animals, consequently requiring fewer resources and antibiotics. Deep bedded systems use a waste product, straw, in much of the western United States and Canada that can be returned to the soil in an enriched form. Hoop structures have performed well not only in the heartland of the hog country but also its northern fringes where cold would be expected to be a problem. Various schemes are also presented for hybrid systems. Indoor farrowing followed by finishing in hoop structures utilizing deep bedding, or pasture farrowing with an indoor nursery followed by some sort of outdoor finishing are two examples. The general idea is to use a system that works efficiently both for the person involved and within the environmental circumstances the farm presents.

The one area that is not addressed well is marketing. No matter how efficiently or humanely swine are raised, if they can't be sold for a profit the farmer will probably be out of the business in a very short time. I would have liked to have seen more articles on alternate marketing strategies, perhaps a review of attempts at setting up a cooperative meat packing plant or cooperative selling arrangement. Smaller independent hog raisers can't always get a fair price for their pigs or have access to the meat-packing plants that large confinement systems enjoy. Cooperatives could be a way to level the playing field.

In the modern swine industry, concentrated confinement systems have spawned an entire manufacturing sector devoted to supplying the expensive devices and machinery required to make confinement work. These interests along with drug companies generally have a vested dislike for methods of raising hogs that don't require large capital investments. This book is specifically aimed at changing that trend. **Daniel A. Schmidt**, *Schuyler, Nebraska*.