

Pork producers and the Internet

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The Information Superhighway is a term generally credited to Vice President Al Gore who first referred to it during a speech in 1991. It is really just a bunch of computers hooked together in a network to allow two-way communication. Some networks consist of a large central computer with a number of smaller computers or terminals hooked to it, such as modern cash registers that scan codes to track inventory in a department store. The Information Superhighway refers to a collection of individual computers and separate networks, all linked together and all speaking a common language (Internet Protocol), so that any computer can communicate with any other computer to form an Internet or web of computers located around the world. Size is important because the larger the net, the more information is out there, in the form of text, graphics, and people with opinions, questions, and answers. The Internet is sometimes referred to as a community of users. As in real life, these users often congregate together on the net in special interest groups, just as they do at parties or coffee shops. Thus, there are groups such as pig farmers, Edsel owners, etc., who have joined together in various ways on the net to share experiences and chat about the issues that concern them.

The Internet concept was developed over 30 years ago as a non-centralized or distributed collection of computers. This was in response to a Department of Defense (DOD) fear that a centralized communication system would be more vulnerable to nuclear attack than would a distributed one where breaking one or two of the communication links would not break the entire communication system. (You may recall that the first action by the allied military during the Gulf War was to knock out the centralized command and communication system in Baghdad, in an attempt to isolate the Iraqi soldiers from the leadership in Baghdad.) For many years, the DOD helped to develop the Internet Protocol that allowed computers to talk to one another and provided critical funding to build the national network infrastructure. By 1990, federal funding responsibility was transferred from the DOD to the National Science Foundation who had, by this time, developed their own network to connect researchers to a series of supercomputers located around the U.S. This was a much faster network than the older DOD system and allowed very rapid growth. In fact, it has been so successful that the Internet has taken on a life of its own, with a number of private companies taking on the responsibilities (and business opportunities) of providing network access and service. The popularity and growth of the Internet over the past three years has been staggering. Worldwide, there are over 9 million Internet domains with millions of potential users in over 100 countries, although only about 1 in every 4 or 5 of those users probably use the Internet in any serious way. As the software becomes easier to use and as connections become faster, this is changing rapidly.

There are a number of ways to get connected to the Internet. Most larger companies and universities operate with local computer networks that are connected directly to the Internet. The approach for most of the rest of us is to use a computer and a modem to dial into an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Most of the commercial on-line services (CompuServe, America OnLine, Prodigy, etc.) also provide Internet access in addition to all their other services, but a number of other companies only provide Internet access, for a monthly fee. The fee is usually determined by the speed of the connection. As with most everything else we buy, fast stuff costs more to own and operate. Buy the fastest modem available _ at present, that is a 28,800 bps unit (about \$175). That will be too slow in a couple of years, but anything slower will prevent you from taking advantage of graphics, such as market trend plots, that are available on the Internet. The Internet is changing daily, doubling in size every year.

What can I do on the Internet?

Electronic mail (or email) has been available for some time. Email is very useful to send messages back and forth to another user located somewhere on the net.

List Server is a very useful modification of email. This is basically an electronic bulletin board. A copy of anything posted to the bulletin board by any user is emailed to you. This is really just a discussion group, which anyone can subscribe to. Producers with access to email may wish to subscribe to the Journal of Swine Health and Production discussion group (swine-L), which is a group of farmers, veterinarians, agribusiness, and university people from around the world who are interested in pork production. One big advantage of email or a list server is that a relatively slow speed dial-up connection (14,400 bps, or even 9600 bps) works fine since no graphics are involved and since access is not interactive. For example, to subscribe to the Journal of Swine Health and Production, send email to: LISTSERV@vm1.spcs.umn.edu and type in: SUBSCRIBE SWINE-L Dale Forsyth as the body of the message (substituting your name for Dale's, of course).

Web Pages are references that list mostly useful information about someone or some topic. Many ISPs help users set up their own web page that tells about their business. Many organizations and businesses have established a web page that provides information on their products and activities. It is possible to download files, purchase materials, or register for conferences at some web pages. It is the web page that is the heart of the current Internet growth. Web pages are created with a relatively easy to use language called Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) which allows images or highlighted words on the page to link to other web pages. These links may have links to other links, creating a gigantic web _ in effect, a World Wide Web (WWW).

The Internet is being taken over by the business community with less federal involvement each year (there are currently over 1000 businesses listed as commercial sites now with over 20% of the traffic now classified as commercial). This profit potential will continually improve and expand the infrastructure and the quality of information and help to continue the growth. You will be able to place orders for machine parts, fertilizer, seed, boars, semen, fans, etc. using an on-line order form provided by a local dealer. You will be able to check on the latest changes to a government program or regulation. Already, much of this is available via DTNs and comparable systems; the difference is that the Internet is two-way and interactive with the entire Internet, not just with the information stored on the local machine, so you are not limited to only receiving information. Weather and market updates, as well as a wealth of information from libraries and universities, are already available on-line. (One of the oldest and most complete is PENpages made available by the agricultural extension service at Penn State University _ access by telnet terminal emulation connection to psupen.psu.edu and login as your two-letter state abbreviation _ but there are many more dealing with most every aspect of agriculture, or any other subject of that matter.) There is much more to come.

In the interim, however, the Internet can be frustrating because of its size and lack of structure. Fortunately, there is help available. Some Internet Service Providers provide a limited amount of hand-holding until you get up and running. There are also a number of excellent books to get started with the Internet. One of the

easiest to read is Internet for Dummies, published by IDG. There is actually a sequel in this Internet series (More Internet for Dummies) that is as readable as the first. These books (and many others) explain the things you will need to know to get connected, often including a list of Internet providers.

Some final words of caution. Use a virus checker on any files you download from bulletin boards or web sites. Some may contain viruses that can infect and damage the existing files on your computer. You should also know that it is often easier to get connected than to get disconnected, short of canceling the credit card that is being debited each month. At the time you sign up for any Internet access service (when the people you are dealing with tend to be the most cooperative), find out the exact procedure that you will need to use should you wish to discontinue that service, write it down and put it some place where you can find it. And, when shopping around for an Internet Service Provider, see if you can find one with local access so that you do not have a long distance charge, and one that charges a fixed rate per month, regardless of how much you use it. Those that charge by the minute, such as America OnLine, CompuServe, and others, can really add up to large bills if you are not very careful. Finally, line quality must be good for high speed data transmission. That can be a problem at the present time and should improve in the future. Contact your telephone company to inquire about options available or to request future upgrading.

Interesting Internet Sites for Pork Producers

<http://netvet.wustl.edu/vet.htm> Net Vet Veterinary Resources

<http://netvet.wustl.edu/pigs.htm> Net Vet Pigs Resources

<http://www.nppc.org/> National Pork Producers Council

<http://www.gennis.com/aglinks.html> AgLinks - Links to Agriculture sites

<http://ianrwww.unl.edu/ianr/pubs/extnpuhs.htm> Nebraska Cooperative Extension Publications

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/cvm/aasp/swine-1-faq.html> Swine-L FAQ

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/cvm/aasp/> AASP-Amer. Assoc. Swine Practitioners

<http://www.ansc.purdue.edu/stages/> STAGES-Swine Testing & Genetic Evaluation System

<http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/library/swine.html> Swine Breeds (OK SU)

<http://www.nando.net/sproject/hogs/hoghome.html> Boss Hog: NC's Pork Revolution (The News & Observer)

<http://www.asas.org/jas.html> Journal of Animal Science

<http://152.1.105.45/> NCSU Extension Swine Husbandry

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/7/ch9.html> Packers and Stockyards (US Code, Title 7, Ch. 9)

<http://agen.www.ecn.purdue.edu/~agenhtml/exten/porkpage/pork21/chpall.htm> Positioning your Pork Operation for the 21st Century (Purdue University)

<http://www-leland.stanford.edu/~rosesage/Muppet.html> Pigs in Cyberspace

<http://www.wildboar.com> Alberta Wild Boar

<http://www.tnc.com/coolhog/> Coolhog Swine Cooling System

<http://www.infolink.morris.mn.us/~leanpig/> Genetipork

<http://www.online.com/pigsongs/> Jingle Bellies Christmas Album

<http://www.pitchfork.com/> Livestock World

<http://granite.sentex.net:80/~ontswine/> Ontario Swine Improvement Inc.

<http://www.agfutures.com> Packers Trading Company

<http://www.avalon.net/~ekraemer/porks.html> PORKS - Producer Oriented Rec System

<http://www.lights.com/psc/> Prairie Swine Centre (Canada)

<http://www.voyager.co.nz/~proand/> ProAnd Associates

<http://www.nnic.noaa.gov/weather.html> NetCast Weather Forecast

<http://www.weather.com/> The Weather Channel

<http://www.intellicast.com/weather/usa/> Intellicast Weather for USA

<http://www.yahoo.com/> Yahoo! search engine

<http://www.lycos.com/> Lycos search engine