

It weighs them, groups them and ensures they get the right feed for their weight.

The buzz term at this year's World Pork Expo in Des Moines was 'sort scales' which can help to reduce variability in weight when finishing pigs in large groups. Terry Cross of Osborne (Europe) Ltd explains how it works...

Our parent company in the USA, Osborne Industries Inc., were showing their Weight Watcher System at Des Moines and reported a high level of interest from producers in the States and Canada, with an order book that extends well into next year.

At the heart of the Weight Watcher System (WWS) is the ACCU-ARM Survey Scale, a tried-and-tested weigh scale that has been in operation for many years. The Survey Scale is equipped with a micro-processor based controller which detects and then stores the weight of each pig as it passes through the scale so that pigs can be sorted into different groups based upon pre-set 'sort weights'. A single load cell, using the proven ACCU-ARM weigh system, makes the measurement. The load cell is located at the top of the scale so it is well away from muck and debris. The weight is acquired so quickly that entrance and exit gates are not needed to stop pigs as they cross the scale. However the Survey Scale is equipped with entry, exit and sort gates for sorting.

Using it in the WWS mode makes it much more than just another automated scale for sorting market pigs. WWS continually divides pigs into 2 to 4 feeding groups as they grow, based upon their rank in the weight distribution for the pen, so allowing different diets to be fed. The rank of each pig and the pen weight distribution for the pen group changes daily and the WWS tracks these changes and ensures that each animal is always fed for its proper weight and rank in the group distribution. By feeding different diets the light pigs can catch up to the heavy pigs, so reducing the sort loss. You might say that the difference between a sort system and the Weight Watcher System is the difference between 'quality control' and 'quality assurance'. WWS is not just a 'market-day automated sorter'. It is a way to totally manage the feeding and production of finishing pigs.

The optional DailyWeigh software package enables reviews of growth curves and monitoring of the average daily gain for groups of pigs (or individual, exceptional animals if using auto ID). Daily Weigh also allows the comparison between pen averages and the prediction of animal weights so that 'days to market' are known. A system of Survey Scales can be economically linked together to a remote PC which will graphically monitor weight distributions and pen weights.