



SwineTex
Consulting Services

Best Management Practices

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I've been working with several clients recently on developing or revising their best management practices. This is one of the more common requests I get from clients and to me, that is an indication that I'm working with a high-quality group of clients. Best Management Practices (BMPs) is defined by the [business dictionary](#) as:

Methods or techniques found to be the most effective and practical means of achieving an objective while making the optimum use of the company's resources.

BMPs are similar to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and I've been known to occasionally use the two interchangeably, but I prefer use "BMPs" for a couple of reasons. First, I like the term "Best". BMPs are Best Management Practices not Ideal Management Practices. As I'll discuss in more detail below, BMPs are not a generic set of guidelines but a set of practices that take into consideration the practical realities faced by individual farms and systems. I also prefer "Management Practices" over "Operating Procedures". The BMPs that I do for clients are not just rigid checklists, they're a combination of strict instructions in some areas and more flexible, conceptual guidelines in others. There are some areas of farm management, such as biosecurity, that must be strictly implemented exactly as instructed. In these areas, there is no room for creativity. There are other areas where some flexibility can be allowed. The key is to clearly identify which is which and to give managers the skills necessary to not just follow instructions but to make decisions that will benefit the farm.

The Goal of BMPs:

While there may be many reasons a client might want to develop BMPs, the overarching goal is to create more consistency in farm operations. Pork production systems are complicated businesses and often they are made up of various types of farms with different facilities, genetics, health statuses and management strategies. This variation can make managing a group of farms very challenging. As the business grows and builds or acquires new farms and facilities, managing this variation becomes increasingly difficult. Oftentimes, this is precisely the time that I am contacted by prospective clients wanting help with standardizing some of their management practices through the BMP process.

Developing BMPs will never eliminate the differences between farms, each site will always be unique, but adopting a common set of management practices can provide a useful framework for creating a more consistent approach to farm management. It is also important to point out that individual farms may need to develop their own work processes that provide additional detail and clarity in how BMPs should be implemented. It is critical, however, that those work processes are consistent with and complimentary to the BMPs that were created for the system.

The BMP Process:

Below you'll find the general procedure that I follow when developing new BMPs for a client.

1. **Meeting with Senior Leadership:** The initial meeting with senior leadership allows them to communicate to me their expectations for the project and gives me the chance to explain the process. This is also where I ask senior leadership to assign team members to the project. The team members should represent every functional area in the business and should represent several levels of management including at least one member of senior leadership.
2. **Review of Current Management Practices:** This process is designed to help me understand current management practices, what's working well and not working well and to get to know the project team.
3. **First Draft of BMPs:** After the review of current management practices, I draft a first version of the BMPs.
4. **Review of First Draft:** Once the first draft is completed, I meet with the project team to review the draft line by line. We use this opportunity to make any necessary changes, clarifications or updates.
5. **Final Version:** After the draft has been reviewed, I update the first draft to reflect all the changes we've discussed and send the final version back to the project team for distribution to the broader production and management team.
6. **Implementation:** This is an optional but highly recommended step in the process. I provide training sessions for the staff on each area of the BMPs. During these training sessions, we talk about what needs to be done, why those practices are important and how to implement the strategies outlined in the BMPs.
7. **Review:** I recommend that BMPs be reviewed at least once per year through a formal review process and throughout the year as needed if conditions change. I recommend a documentation procedure that allows changes and revisions to be clearly recorded and communicated to the staff.

Structure of BMPs:

There is not right or wrong way to structure BMPs, but they generally end up being broken down into sections. A BMP document is created for each section and ultimately, every section is combined into a complete collection of BMPs that serves as a production manual. Again, there's no right or wrong way to do this but here's a common example of how these BMPs are broken down:

- Biosecurity
- Gilt Development
- Gestation Management

- Farrowing & Lactation Management
- Nursery Management
- Finishing Management

Keys to Success:

- Clear Expectations
 - It is critical that everyone involved in the project understands the goals of the project as well as the limitations of BMPs. One of the common misunderstandings is that BMPs are supposed to describe an ideal scenario. We don't live in an ideal world and while Ideal Management Practices might have some theoretical educational value, they don't have much in the way of practical application value. I try to design Best Management Practices that represent the best way to do things given the situation managers are actually in. BMPs must consider any limitations faced by the farm or system. For this reason, BMPs are intensely custom and the right solution for one farm or system can be significantly different from the right solution for another farm or system. **BMPs are not THE Best Management Practices but YOUR Best Management Practices.** BMPs are not an aspirational document, they are a practical document.
- Ownership of BMPs
 - It is critical that the production team take ownership of the BMPs. I am constantly reinforcing to the project team throughout this process that these are not my BMPs, they are their BMPs. My role is to facilitate and advise them, not to direct them.
- Execution
 - Our goal at SwineTex is and has always been to help our clients achieve results. A well-crafted set of BMPs can be a powerful tool to help achieve better performance but only if they are implemented. In order to maximize the value of BMPs, they must be consistently implemented, regularly reviewed and revised as needed. If we develop a document that gets printed out, but in a binder and set on a shelf collecting dust, the project has been a failure. I tell clients interested in a BMP process to expect the entire process to take 6-12 months. The first 3-6 months is spent developing, drafting and reviewing the documents themselves and the second 3-6 months is spent training the team and deploying and implementing the practices outlined in the documents.

If you are interested in learning more about BMPs or want information about developing BMPs for your farm or system, SwineTex would be happy to help. Contact information is below.

About the Author:

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