

Dr. Derald Holtkamp, Professor at Iowa State University, and **Rachel Johnson**, Technical Account and Production Support Lead at MetaFarms, share how data from swine mortality can be used to aid producers in decreasing mortality rates on their farms moving forward.

Background

Swine mortality has consistently been a problem for producers not only in the United States, but worldwide. Data from recent years of swine mortality may offer insights that will help producers achieve better outcomes in the future. Dr. Derald Holtkamp and Rachel Johnson shared their analysis of historical mortality and outlook to the audience of the 2025 International Conference on Pig Livability in November 2025. Their big take away was, production is different than it was 50 years ago, we need to adapt.

International Swine Mortality Data

The Global Swine Benchmarking Project, funded by Merck Animal Health in the U.S., evaluates the profitability, costs, and productivity of swine production in pork-producing countries. Holtkamp has been a part of the project since 2018. Together, they collect data from InterPig and Merck across countries worldwide, run their analyses, and release their findings yearly, though the process is lengthy. Currently, they are working to release market-sensitive values, such as market pig and feed prices, quarterly. Holtkamp also works on factor analysis. Factor analysis sorts out which factors gave producers in each country a relevant competitive advantage or disadvantage in terms of profitability that year. The top three profitability factors in 2023 were market pig prices, feed, and productivity. Countries that do not face as extreme disease pressure as the U.S. do have an advantage.

U.S. Swine Mortality Data

MetaFarms compared mortality data from 2015 to 2024. Phases tracked included sow mortality, litter performance (total born, live born, percentage of stills, percentage of mummies), and pre-weaning mortality. Then, data is broken down into the nursery, weaning, and weaning-to-finish phases. Data show that mortality is increasing over time. However, good things are happening: the U.S. is farrowing more pigs and decreasing mortality in some areas. Pre-weaning mortality didn't have a linear track like total born and live born. Diseases such as PRRS and PEDV have taken a toll on pork production in the U.S. Pig producers need to weigh the options for implementing mortality-reducing measures against what makes financial sense for their system.

Takeaways

Swine production looks vastly different than how it did 50 years ago. To combat that, producers must adapt to find ways to improve mortality rates. Balancing raising pork at a profitable cost and implementing new practices can be difficult, but not impossible. Identifying which aspects of production processes are driving biosecurity outbreaks and working to minimize them will be beneficial. The pork industry must continue to collect data and research how to reduce biosecurity outbreaks.

Listen to this full podcast please visit: <https://globalagnetwork.com/pigx/podcast/season-6-episode-9-swine-mortality-trends-insights-from-u-s-and-global-data>

