



MICHIGAN SOYBEAN PROMOTION COMMITTEE

a new release



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Sows Love Soymeal

Recent Recent hurricanes and tropical storms in the southeastern states remind us that nature can be harsh. Even heavy rain can be harsh. That's why, when the Nortons of rural Bronson, Michigan, decided to expand their farm to feed their growing family in 1980, they brought their sows indoors.

At the time, Kendale Farm was operated by Rolland and Margaret Norton and their sons Dale and Ken. When the senior Nortons retired in 2003, they sold their share to two of their grandchildren, Dale's son Michael and Ken's son Josh. Now the farm established by Rolland's father is operated by the third and fourth generations of Nortons.

Dale refers to the Centennial Farm as a "four-family multigenerational farm." He adds, "It takes a certain threshold of size and considerable efficiency to be able to generate enough income to allow us and our children to continue farming as a vocation." It's a choice each generation has made, but what's important to each is that their children have the opportunity to make their own choice.

Like 98 percent of farms in the USA, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, Kendale Farm is still a family farm. Often handed down from generation to generation, family-owned, family-operated farms are still managed with the same values, care, and commitment as the generations who established them.

The Norton family has seen the agriculture industry go through a lot of changes. Their modern systems take into account animal wellbeing, environmental concerns, and the work environment. It takes a combination of proven science, practical experience, and common sense.

The Nortons built barns to protect their animals from predators, adverse weather, and disease. The barns help them control the environment, keep better records, and manage the manure in an environmentally friendly way.

Dale says, "We follow the GAAMPs"—Michigan's Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices. GAAMPs are uniform statewide standards and acceptable management practices based on sound science.

Michigan's GAAMPs address practices to prevent sows from fighting and from crushing their newborn piglets. They address the needs for dry bedding in cold weather, adequate access to water, and cleaning feeders regularly to prevent spoilage. The Kendale hog barns were designed to meet the hogs' every need for comfort and health. The farrowing stalls allow the family to feed, water, and observe each sow individually to provide for her health and safety.

Animal welfare gets more than lip service from this Michigan farmer. Dale chairs the Animal Welfare Committee of the National Pork Board, which promotes safe food and responsible animal care through scientifically sound practices, and funds research about animal well-being. Working with animal welfare experts, the committee developed an objective, scientific program to assess animal welfare, regardless of the size or type of facilities.

Kendale Farm participates in the Pork Quality Assurance-Plus program, which addresses housing, air quality, caretaker training, and other factors through education, assessment of sites where pigs are raised, and potential selection for a third-party audit—all to assure continuous improvement.

Today's farmers have the advantage of a lot more knowledge about scientifically sound practices than their grandparents had, and they're always looking to improve their operations. Dale says, "We don't want to turn our backs on technology that makes food more safe."

Soy protein has helped the hog producers weather the ups and downs of the business of caring for animals 365 days a year. The farm feeds 800 tons of soybean meal a year, supporting the average production of four or five Michigan soybean farmers. They can use the cheaper dry distillers grains in pig finishing rations, but sow rations need the high-quality protein that soy provides.

Kendale Farm also grows "low-lin" soybeans, used to make oil with reduced linolenic fatty acid content. These varieties, developed through the farmer-funded soybean checkoff, allow manufacturers to produce food products without trans fats.

Dale is quick to point out that there are all sizes of producers with all types of production systems. "We do things a certain way because they seem to work the best for us that way," he says. Free to eat and drink without fear or aggressive behavior from other sows, the pigs at Kendale Farm are living in "hog heaven."

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The Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee works to enhance the profitability of Michigan's soybean producers through investment of soybean checkoff funds. MSPC works to build markets for soybeans through educational programs, promotion of biodiesel and other new soybean uses, and funding agronomic research. MSPC is led by a board of farmers elected to direct the investment of soybean checkoff funds on behalf of the more than 10,000 Michigan soybean farmers. For information about soybean checkoff results, call (989) 652-3294 or visit www.michigansoybean.org. To learn more about good stewardship practices and the connection between crop production and animal agriculture, visit www.animalag.org.