



SWINE SOLUTIONS

Meeting customer needs during challenging times

By: [Dr. Stewart Galloway, senior swine nutritionist](#)

Pork producers face new challenges every day — and often several at the same time. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the work we did as swine nutritionists was helping our customers identify cost areas and adjusting those costs appropriately. This included options to lower costs and to identify programs that gave the best return on investment (ROI). Shortly after COVID-19 hit, several ethanol plants stopped production, eliminating DDGS as an ingredient for many farms and requiring the formulation of a new set of diets for most pork producers. When ethanol production resumed, so did the availability of DDGS — but with the opportunity to review diet costs at the same time. When the packing plants shut down due to COVID-19 concerns among workers, slow-down diets were needed to help customers manage growth until hogs could be marketed. As the delays continued, an entirely new type of diet for commercial pig production was needed: the holding diet. These were successfully accomplished. As packing plants came back online, producers needed diets to speed up pigs to reach their desired marketing windows. Long-term strategies turned into a short-term focus on critical factors. Communication between managers, owners and nutritionists was key to making sure that all factors were being addressed and the best options were implemented — in many cases, on short notice.

During challenging times, it's easy to lose sight of long-term goals and focus only on short-term needs. While evaluating ingredients and finding ways to reduce costs may be critical for survival, what happens when economics change and the focus goes back to productivity? The need to conduct research and uncover new technologies and feeding programs never stops. Our LLRC research facility continues to conduct research and is investing in a new 5,000-head nursery barn to start research projects this fall. Undertaking feed trials that evaluate ingredients and nutrients in nursery feeds to maintain or improve performance at a lower cost will continue to be a high priority. Our [POWERSTART Solo](#) technologies will help us find ways for our customers to optimize their nursery performance and ROI. Our customers are aware that consumers have concerns about the environment and sustainability, so continued research studying how [Bioplex® mineral supplementation](#) affects performance and carcass quality will also be key in the future.

For many farms, short-term needs are now taking priority and are the main area of focus over long-term goals and plans. We know that there is creative value in face-to-face meetings, but the safety of our customers is our top priority. Whether you prefer to meet in person or virtually, we respect your preference and will work to accommodate our customers' requests. Everyone is learning that flexibility regarding meeting locations and being prepared with protective equipment are just part of the "new normal."

Our technical team has found that the use of technologies like FaceTime allows them to do walkthroughs with customers that adhere to [COVID-19](#) and biosecurity protocols while still providing a valuable method of investigation and problem-solving. What a great opportunity to use technology to bring expertise to the farm, even if the individual is halfway across the U.S.!

By being forced to do something different, we have learned that there are advantages to virtual discussions, especially when they allow farm owners and managers to transcend distance and biosecurity challenges to go in-depth on a requested topic or have open discussions. Twenty-five people may not fit in a conference room, but they will fit on a conference call. While there are benefits to meeting in-person, there are time and travel cost-savings that come from having virtual meetings. What other opportunities do we have to bring resources to your farm now that we're more comfortable with conference calls and virtual meetings?

Finally, during challenging times, it's important to understand that communication isn't just talking — it's listening. Whether individually, with friends or with colleagues, how can we work together to understand the challenges we are facing and collaborate to find positive outcomes? As a nutrition supplier, Hubbard strives to find creative ways to strengthen our relationships with our customers. We want to know what resources you need to survive in the "new normal" and how we can provide them. This year will continue to be challenging, but the resolve and resiliency of our customers is truly amazing. Working together, we can find solutions to not just survive but thrive in the future.