

5 Lessons Learned While Working In The Oink Booth At The MN State Fair

Yesterday was a first for me and my husband. We both worked in the Oink Booth at the Minnesota State Fair. Here are just a few takeaways from the day:

1) **People love pigs!** And especially baby pigs! They love taking pictures of them. They love petting them. And they love watching them, especially during feeding time.

2) **People love talking to farmers.** They have questions and are truly engaged in conversations about pigs. They want to know why the tails are docked, how many pigs sows have, how many litters she has in a lifetime, why the cost of bacon is high, how long it takes her to have baby pigs . . . And the list goes on and on. We both had *many* quality conversations with people who were genuinely interested in talking with us. Pretty cool.

3) **A very, very small number of people have concerns about pig farming.** Of all the people I talked with, only one person was a little upset by seeing mama sow in a farrowing stall with her baby pigs. I listened to her, looked directly at her and acknowledged her concerns. I pointed out we have common ground because we both are concerned about the sow's well-being. Even though I knew I wasn't going to change her mind, she now knows the face of a pig farmer. She also knows she was not disrespected or belittled for her concerns. Sometimes you have to start with small steps.

4) **People don't know much about pigs.** They were amazed how fast they grow. By next February, the baby pigs will weigh about 280 pounds (6 months of age) and ready for market. Even though some were a taken aback a bit when I added that when they are taken to market, we will all be enjoying pork chops, ham and bacon.

5) **Working at the Oink Booth allows us as farmers connect directly with consumers.** We both felt really good about our conversations yesterday. It's pretty exhilarating when a complete stranger shakes your hand after talking with them and says thank you. And this happened more than once.

We have a really **big** job of talking and connecting with consumers. Yes, it's overwhelming, but we have **no** choice but to do it. And it's going to take all of us. I encourage all farmers to take some time and talk with consumers. It's rewarding and people truly do want to see the "face of agriculture" in an environment where they feel comfortable asking questions and sharing their concerns. And I have no doubt about that after yesterday!