

Devastating Consequences From A Sow Farm Fire

As I was sitting in my combine seat this past Saturday afternoon thinking about how nice the corn looked as I was harvesting, I noticed to my north and east smoke. I honestly didn't think too much of it--thinking someone was burning their CRP land or burning a road ditch. What I didn't realize at the time was this smoke was a sow farm burning. Cougar Run is a sow farm (sows and piglets) located about 20 miles northeast from where I live and there were billows of smoke coming from it's barns. As I have had some time to process this tragedy, I realize there are some other devastating consequences from this fire.

I personally do not know much about this farm or the people who own it or work there, but as a fellow pig farmer I am so sorry for what has happened. The death of 4100 sows and about 6000 piglets is almost unbearable to think about. There were four employees working at the time and they were able to escape without injury.

Thankfully.

I [listened to this video from Kaycee Gebhart](#), one of the employees, talk about the fire. And she's right, "a truck is replaceable, barns are replaceable, but these hogs are our livelihood. And we cared for them every day. They were more than livestock and that's what we want people to understand."

Not only is losing the animals horrific, but the barns are gone. 15 people, who left their job on Friday to enjoy a beautiful Minnesota fall weekend, now find their place of employment gone on Monday. And beyond that, pig farmers who are counting on those piglets in the coming weeks and months to put in their barns will no longer have them. What will they do in the interim? They will either outsource their weaned pigs from elsewhere, rent the barns to someone else or let them sit empty until new barns are built. Neither of these choices are perfect. The issue with outsourcing weaned pigs is the market can be very volatile and disease is also an issue. When you have ownership in a sow farm, such as Cougar Run, you purchase weaned pigs at a price close the cost of raising the pig. These prices stay pretty stable and helps to take some risk out of pig farming. When you purchase weaned pigs elsewhere, you are at the mercy of the supply and demand market)which can be brutal at times) and also the possibility of more risk because of pig health concerns. Letting a barn sit empty is not viable as the farmer has costs associated with the barns, such as barn payments, heating the barns and general upkeep. Renting the barns may not be a viable option when trying to find the right person and the right fit. It is some of these other issues we tend to forget about because we are so focused on the immediate devastation. And rightly so. But soon, reality will set in as these other issues will need to be dealt with.

Today as we stepped into our barns, we were a little more attentive. Does everything look right? Is there any potential fire hazards? Even though we don't know the cause of the Cougar Run fire as

of yet, one can't help but be more cautious about your own barns.

And you count your blessings just a little more intently.

At this point and until we know different, it was an accident. A terrible, terrible accident. I am also a believer in finding a little good coming from something so, so bad. And I hope this case is no exception.

So far there is some good. From the feedback I am receiving, people are showing compassion and support for this farm and community. Small town America *supports* each another, through good and bad. And I couldn't be more proud.

For more coverage, please check out [KEYC-TV](#).