

IOWA LAKES COMMUNITY COLLEGE PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A FUTURE IN THE SWINE INDUSTRY

Mary Feldskov

When Kelly Dodge returned to teach at her alma mater at Iowa Lakes Community College, she brought with her the skills, knowledge and tools she had gained in more than 14 years in the pork production industry. Among those tools was PigCHAMP Knowledge Software, which is now a key teaching tool in Iowa Lake's Agriculture Production Technology Program.

Iowa Lakes is a community college with campuses in several north-western Iowa communities, and offers students associate degrees and diplomas in a number of disciplines ranging from accounting to health care administration to massage therapy. Among their many varied programs are courses in agribusiness and agriculture production technology, and their campus in Emmetsburg boasts some of the best and technologically advanced facilities for students to gain hands-on experience. Students in the 2-year program split their time between classroom activities, working on the 360-acre laboratory farm, and in on-farm-job placements in the crop, beef and swine industries.

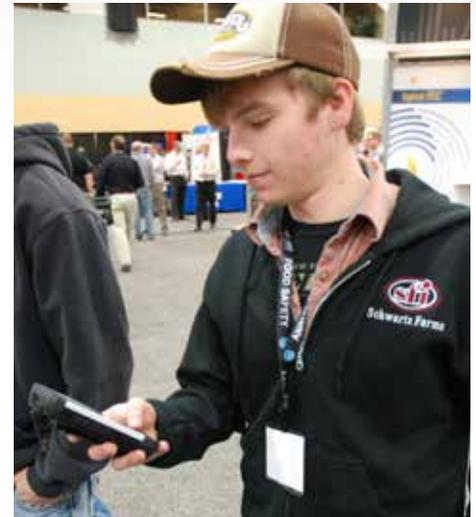
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The need for qualified and well-trained production workers on hog farms has been a hot-topic in the industry for many years. As the industry shifted to more specialized production, increased the use of on-farm technology and farms increased in size, production workers needed to be better equipped to meet the demands of their jobs.

Iowa Lakes has had a long history in providing agriculture production education. In 1972, the 360 acres of

farmland was purchased from Dr. Howard McCutchen, a Missouri veterinarian, to create its Farm Laboratory. The Iowa Lakes Farm Foundation, a non-profit corporation, was created to govern the new farm laboratory and drew its membership from the local agriculture community. Today, students get hands-on learning opportunities in the cow/calf barn, beef feedlot, swine barns, machine shed, shop and office. Corn, soybeans and hay are the main crops grown on the farm, and students are involved in all aspects of planting, managing and harvesting the crops.

In 2013, Iowa Lakes Community College's commitment to training production workers in the swine industry was realized through the building of a brand-new, 7,500 square foot Swine Training Center, featuring a farrowing room, a nursery and three finishing spaces that connected to the existing breeding and gestation building. The unit accommodates up to 12 sows every five weeks, and the nursery and each grower space can house up to 120 pigs. Built by New Modern Concepts in Iowa Falls, the modern facility is equipped with several different styles and brands of equipment. The goal of the Swine Training Center is to replicate, on a smaller scale, what students would experience on a typical hog farm, including the most up-to-date technologies such as real-time ultrasound and artificial insemination.



Dan Oeltjenbrus, a sophomore in the Agriculture Production Program at Iowa Lakes Community College, was among the students who were interested in the power and capabilities of PigCHAMP Mobile at the 2015 Iowa Pork Congress.

Using PigCHAMP software is among the technology that students are exposed to through their learning. “It’s important for students to learn about technology that they will use in their careers,” said Dodge, who, along with several students, met with PigCHAMP staff at the 2015 Iowa Pork Congress. In addition to using Reproductive and Grow-Finish software to manage their herd of 75 sows, the sow-unit has recently added a PigCHAMP Mobile handheld device.

The students who gathered around the



The 360-acre Iowa Lakes College Farm Lab offers students hands-on learning in swine, beef and crop production.

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Iowa Lakes Community College built a brand-new swine facility in 2013 that gives students the opportunity to learn about the production process from breeding through to finishing. (Photo courtesy of New Modern Concepts)

PigCHAMP booth were enthusiastic about their education and their future job prospects. While most arrived at Iowa Lakes with some experience in the industry, either on a family farm or through part-time employment, they felt that the skills and experience that they were gaining through the program would give them an leg-up when they entered the industry full-time – propelling them into management positions faster or giving them the knowledge to make better management decisions on their family farms.

Dan Oeltjenbrus, a sophomore at Iowa Lakes, hails from rural Nebraska where he and his family have a long history of being involved in the swine industry. Working alongside his father in hog barns, and raising some pigs of his own as a high school student, Oeltjenbrus knew he wanted to work in the swine industry, but wasn't sure exactly what he wanted to do. With a lot of choice in agriculture education, Iowa Lakes stood out to him for a number of reasons, including its reputation as a strong agriculture program, the hands-on opportunities to work on the farm and the new swine building.

"The best part of the program is how well they mix and balance class time with hands-on experience out on the farm." Small class sizes, of approximately 20 students in each year, mean that every student has the opportunity to get

involved in all aspects of managing the hog production process.

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Oeltjenbrus appreciates the exposure to technology that Iowa Lakes offers its students. He and his classmates are learning how technological tools like PigCHAMP software and PigCHAMP Mobile can help make a farmer more efficient and productive. "I hope to work in hog barns and maybe even build my own," says Oeltjenbrus. "My education will allow me to be open to more ways of



The new farrowing room holds up to 12 sows and is equipped with several different styles and brands of equipment, showcasing the newest trends in swine facilities. (Photo courtesy of New Modern Concepts)

doing things."

As an agriculture instructor and manager of the hog barn, Dodge teaches varied production and agriculture business courses in swine including reproduction, animal health and grow/finish management. But it's the time spent in working in the barn, with the students, that is the most rewarding part of her job. "The best part of what I do is teaching the students the hands-on aspects of production," she says.

For more information about Iowa Lakes Community College and its swine education program, visit www.iowalakes.edu.



MARY FELDSKOV

Mary Feldskov joined PigCHAMP in 2014 in the role of marketing and communications specialist. She is responsible for developing and implementing marketing and communications strategies such as the PigCHAMP website, e-newsletters, marketing materials and trade show organization. Mary is one of several team members who works remotely, and is located in Guelph, Ontario, Canada.