

Production Pointers

By Charlie McKenzie and Derek Widman

Over the years, there has been a lot of discussion about the use and implementation of standard operating procedures, or SOPs, on swine farms; some good and some bad. Some points in favor of SOPs include that they help with new employee training, give direction to the farm staff, and assist in farm efficiency. On the other hand, some think that SOPs can stifle employee ideas on the farm and reduces the amount that employees go above and beyond. Through our experiences, SOPs are only as good as the time spent putting them together and the involvement of the farm staff in putting them together.

Therefore, some of the pointers that we stress when putting together SOPs for a farm are:

- 1.) **Farm Specific.** One of the main issues we see with SOPs that are part of a farm system, is that there is a single SOP for multiple farms with multiple set-ups and conditions. Therefore, we encourage people to develop a general SOP for their farm system, and then modify them to meet each individual farms needs and routines.
- 2.) **Employees.** Look into the generation of employees on the farm and investigate how they learn. An example of this, is that on farms with young employees from generation-Y (why), we approach SOPs in a different manner than other generations. If a farm has a fairly young and inexperienced crew, we tend to use the SOPs as a learning opportunity and describe the reasons behind the development of the SOPs.
- 3.) **Create Value.** This point goes together well with number two. The reason why SOPs tend to just be paper weights in the office, is that they are just filled with documents that tells employees what to do. However, we like to structure SOPs in a way that they are a reference book for the farm. Therefore, as new issues pop-up on the farm employees will go to this manual to see if it can help them with this current issue; then while looking into the issue they may come across and review other documents.
- 4.) **Employee Buy In.** For SOPs to be successful, employees must buy into them and see their value. Therefore, when SOPs are being developed we encourage farms to gain employee perspectives and ideas.
- 5.) **Update, Update, Update.** SOPs are useful only as long as they are relevant. Therefore, when new issues arrive on the farm that employees question or new methods of handling old issues arise, the SOPs must be reviewed and updated. In addition to this, having a yearly update of farm SOPs will ensure that they stay as up-to-date as possible.

Although this is just a short list of pointers that we use in assisting farms to develop their own SOPs, there are many more. If you are looking into this option for your farms, please feel free to contact us at charlie.mckenzie@babcockgenetics.com or derek@babcockgenetics.com, and we can assist you in developing your own SOPs.