



Hustle, Hustle, Hustle, Sell, Sell, Sell

Hustle, hustle, hustle, develop a good website, door to door visits, take the orders, and deliver a consistent product each time is how hog producer Ian Smith continues to make a good living from 25 sows, farrow to finish, 13 head of cattle, 80 laying hens, and a quarter section of land, and raising the pigs like mom and dad did. Hogs have been the main income on this farm since about 1969.

"I'm doing good, albeit on a small scale, but still going out there and marketing my own, by passing the middle man, hustle, hustle, hustle, that is what you have to do and working with the domestic market here," said Smith from his farmhouse at Argyle, MB recently. "One day alone I put on over 300 miles delivering pork for free, in the Interlake and Winnipeg."

He's one producer who is still getting top dollar for his pigs.



"I'm selling for \$1.57 a pound, cut and wrapped, so I get about \$210 a pig. Today on the open market producers are getting about \$90 to \$110," said Smith.

Interlake Packers at St. Laurent, MB does all the processing for him. The customer calls Smith, having heard either by word of mouth or looked at his website (www.naturalpork.ca), and tells him how they want it processed. How many pork chops per package and how many pounds the hams and roasts are to weigh, and he passes the order on to the packing plant.

They kill, slaughter, cut and wrap, make the sausage, smoke and cure the meat. It takes about ten days for the meat to smoke and cure.

Later he picks it up in boxes and delivers it for free.

Whatever he can't sell privately, a whole pig, a half or a quarter, Interlake Packers buys it paying him the open market price. The second week in September, he averaged out \$226 dollars a pig, animals a little heavy, while one pig went to the open market for 90 dollars.

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By raising his own feed and keeping his operation small, his overhead and expenses are quite low, and he's debt free. However, even he isn't making money at 90 dollars gross on a market hog. He needs close to \$130 a hog to break even.

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Ian Smith

"I'm not worried about that part -- the part I like is that \$200 range. 75 per cent of my 250 to 300 hogs go for private sale."

Today Smith has about 300 customers, most are seniors, young people, young families, ones that are concerned about the environment and how producers raise the animals. The First Nations people are one of his biggest customers, and local farmers.

Having the newest and latest technology isn't something that attracts him.

"Why change it when the farm is running good. I'm not machinery poor," said the one quarter section farmer from Argyle. "The tractor I use daily to haul the manure to the field is a 1954 John Deere 60. Most people would have parked that years ago, or put it into a parade. All my machinery is older, but in top notch condition and shedded."

The big difference is this family hasn't gone the way most others have.

"We haven't expanded and put up one to two million dollar barns and that ... I guess living the simple life and enjoying farming still as a life style," he muses aloud. "Yes, I feel sorry for those who are losing money, but I could see that coming years ago. We're like puppets to the big packing plants. They pull the strings and we do the dance and take what they give us. This shouldn't happen. We should be out their marketing some of our own hogs, getting the public to know what quality good pork really is."

Smith realizes that isn't the way of the future for most other producers. He sees Maple Leaf and Hytek, two of the largest producers in Canada not affected in the same way as most other producers because they have become dominant. They have their own feed mills, killing plants, and farmers will be the employees to these companies. •

— By Harry Siemens
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