

# Gestation Group Sow Housing Options: Sow Housing Options Tool (SHOT) – Introduction



## Why is this tool needed in the industry?

Housing sows in individual stalls has become commonplace across the pork industry. This housing method is popular with pork producers because sows are fed and cared for individually. However, growing consumer concern has increased scrutiny on this standard industry practice. Multiple states have passed legislation that mandates that pregnant females be group housed for specified portions of gestation. This change in system design and production method has caused concern among pork producers, and they have stated their need for information and specifications on group sow housing options. In Michigan, results from pork producer focus groups identified descriptions of various group sow housing methods, along with economic comparisons of those options, as their top educational need. Members of the Michigan State University Extension pork group, with assistance from allied industry, have developed the Sow Housing Options Tool (SHOT), a financial comparison tool that enables producers to economically compare group sow housing systems.

## What is SHOT?

SHOT allows producers to compare the economics of various group sow housing options. Developed using a standard Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, this tool allows users to input data for different systems and calculate a cost comparison. Farm performance numbers, capital investment expenditures, and feed, operating and overhead costs are then used to calculate annual cost, breeding/gestation cost per pig and per sow for transitioning an operation to group sow housing. This information will aid producers in determining which group sow housing system they may transition to. A SHOT user's guide is available to aid producers in using this tool. It describes what input information is needed, creates a common language for all users and explains how to interpret the results. The user's guide also provides instructions on how to modify the tool to meet the user's needs. The MSU Extension pork group has also developed a number of educational materials,

including fact sheets describing the group sow housing options that are available to the industry.

## How is the tool used?

The Sow Housing Options Tool is intended to be used in two ways. For producers who are just starting to explore group sow housing options, the tool provides examples for five systems: electronic sow feeding (ESF), trickle feeding, floor feeding, short stalls (also called non-gated stalls or stanchions) and free-access stalls. Information on each group sow housing option was developed using the assistance of allied industry and pork producers who have implemented these types of group sow housing.

The tool uses the farm's present production and cost information to develop a baseline for comparison. The user can then modify the input information for any of these systems on the basis of quotes or other current information provided by suppliers or advisers. The tool is intended to allow a real-time comparison of the cost of the various systems for an individual operation.

Producers can also use the tool to compare cost estimates from equipment suppliers for the same type of group sow housing system. Users can also adjust their farm's performance numbers and current building size on the basis of their current and proposed farm business plans to evaluate different scenarios.

## Where can I find this product?

The Sow Housing Options Tool and other resource information compiled by the MSU Extension pork group are housed on the MSU Extension Pork page [msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/pork](https://msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/pork). The information at this site is available for those interested in group sow housing to download and utilize for their benefit. Contact information for Extension educators and MSU swine specialists with expertise in this area is also listed on this site.

## What is the cost?

There is no charge to use the information on the MSU Extension group sow housing site. These resources have been compiled through the support of the Michigan Pork Producers Association and grants supporting MSU Extension. The goal of the pork group is to develop information for pork producers and allied industry that will aid them in managing their operations and evaluating business decisions.

## Survey information

To gain a better understanding of the actual cost of implementing group sow housing into modern pork production and the management changes that this may entail, the MSU Extension pork group has developed a web-based survey for those who access SHOT. Producers and allied industry representatives who use the tool will be asked to supply their contact information, including e-mail address. They'll be sent a link to a confidential electronic survey. The goal of the survey is to expand the industry's knowledge about transitioning to group sow housing. The information gathered will be summarized and published in educational materials and journals. No individual farm or producer information will be disclosed.



Photo provided courtesy of National Pork Board.

## Contact

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Visit the Gestation Group Sow Housing page on the MSU Extension website at [bit.ly/SowHousingOptions](http://bit.ly/SowHousingOptions).

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