

American

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from artificial breeding are having a closed herd which is free from disease, and one which is bred with semen from top quality boars. And, as he said at the FFA hog show last July, it's the quality more than anything which he is after now.

Mostly, Cliff raises a cross breed of Yorkshire-Hampshire swine, and feels that a York-Hamp bred to a Duroc is the best cross because of the combination of good mothering qualities and really heavy muscling.

Besides good breeding practices such as hand breeding, there are other ways of managing the herd which Cliff feels are important to having top quality animals.

First of all, he ear notches one ear of all his pigs so he knows which sow they came from. In this way, if any litter does come out with poor quality, he knows what sow to trace it to and, therefore, knows to get rid of her.

He also marks the date of birth on the other ear, so he can watch the rate of development and trace the growth pattern back to the parents.

Another practice which he feels is important and therefore does himself is grinding the feed for his animals.

"Mixing your own feed to the right proportions is a big factor in raising pigs," he says. Cliff uses a pre-mix and adds the extra ingredients and medication the exact proportions.

And, while he doesn't claim that the type of farrowing houses he uses has

anything to do with producing top animals, he is really enthusiastic about the new operation he put in this summer. Instead of the well-known confinement houses which many hog producers use, Cliff and his father took somewhat of a risk this summer and became one of a few in the state to try "isolets" on a large scale.

Isolets are individual houses set out in the open on concrete, and instead of holding several sows at one time, each unit holds only one sow and litter.

Each prefabricated house has an opening to an outdoor concrete pen, and the sow is free to be either inside the piglets. Each unit is styrofoam insulated, and to keep the piglets comfortable, a heater is installed in a corner of each.

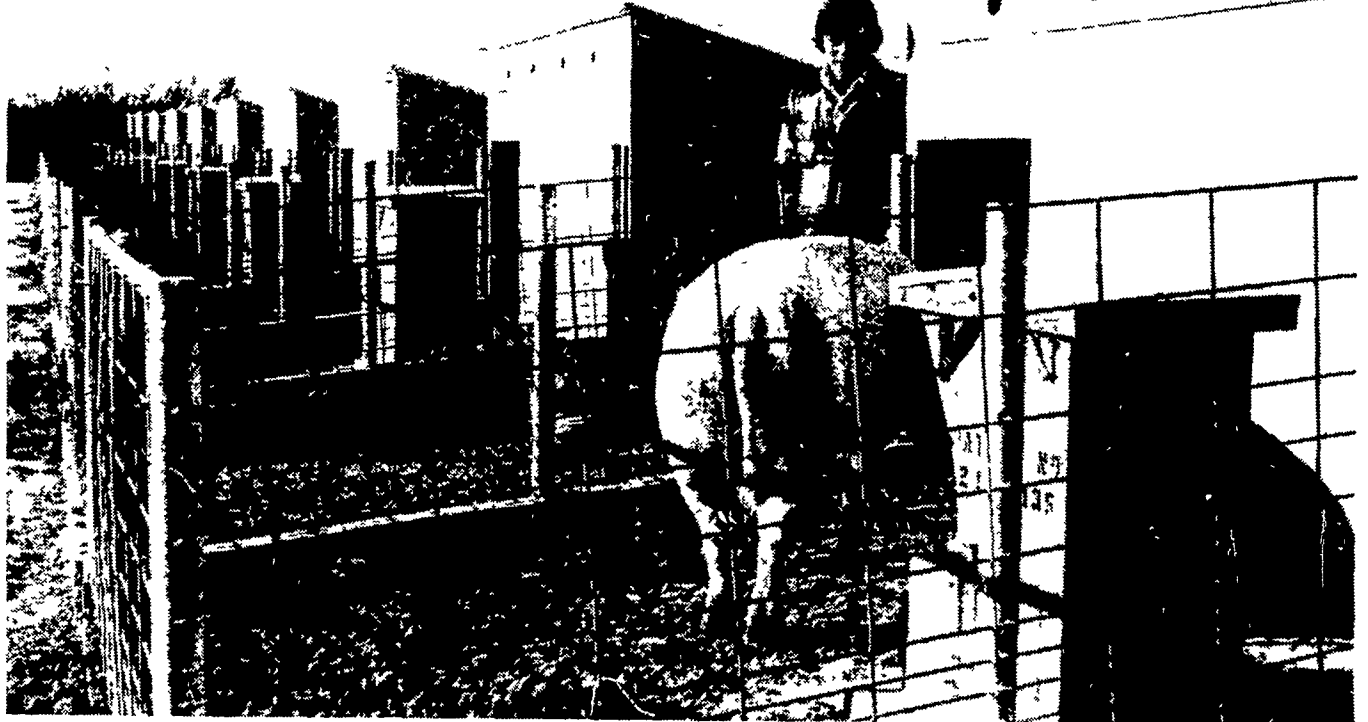
"We have less farrowing problems with the isolet," says Cliff. "The sows can walk in and out, so they don't get upset from being confined, which sometimes happens."

Cliff also says that the warmth of the heater pulls the piglets away from the sow fairly well, so there is less chance of her laying on them.

There are several other good points which Cliff is quick to explain.

First of all, he points out, they utilize a self-feeding system, so the feeders only have to be filled every five or six days, and at that time it only takes Cliff and Nancy about 10 minutes to do the 20 isolettes they have set up so far. (They plan to have three rows of 10 each when they have completed putting them all up.)

"The pigs almost never



Cliff checks one of the sows in his new farrowing house set-up. Ten of the isolets are lined up in a row.

manure in their isolet, either," Cliff explains. That had been one of the concerns of the partnership before they bought the units.

"We thought that cleaning out every one of those 30 units would have been an awful lot to keep up with," he says with a smile. But, fortunately, the animals keep the isolets clean, and manure on the concrete. And, even that is not as much work as it could be, because the active piglets work it all out of the pens onto another strip of concrete where all the Charlies have to do is run a skid loader up through and their work is done in a matter minutes.

"And, we only have to clean out the houses with each weaning," says Cliff. That's every five or six weeks.

"The way I see it, it's a real labor saver," he concludes.

Cliff and Nancy also feel the isolet strengthens the pigs.

"In the summer, the little ones are outside in the fresh air and sunshine in a couple of days after they are born," says Nancy. And, according to them, this helps the piglets become healthy.

There are a few disadvantages, however. Although the units come prefabricated, there is still quite a bit of labor involved in pouring the concrete, and Cliff admits that in the winter it is sometimes uncomfortable to have to work outside. Also, in the summer, the heater doesn't pull the pigs away from the sow as

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