

Solanco student took his pigs from petting zoo to Farm Show

By DIETER KRIEG

PEACH BOTTOM, Pa. - Up until six months ago, 15-year old Mike Rhoads had his heart set on becoming a dairy farmer. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Sam Rhoads, keep about 35 milking cows on the 110-acre family farm just south of this southern Lancaster County community. Dairy farming was all the young man had really ever known, as far as agriculture is concerned.

That has all changed now.

In the Spring of 1976 Mike purchased two 8-week old pigs, got them ready for the County FFA hog show and came close to winning. He placed second and liked the idea of showing hogs.

Asked what he would like to do after graduation, from high school, Mike wastes no time in answering that he'd like to raise hogs and earn his living that way.

Two weeks ago his vo-ag teacher and project advisor, Dr. William Fredd, informed Mike that he'd be going to the Farm Show with his two pigs. The news came as a surprsie to the young man, especially since his present projects started out as part of an exhibit for the childrens' petting zoo at the Solanco Fair.

When Mike enters the show ring in Harrisburg this coming Thursday, it'll be only the second time in his life that he has done so. The first time was in July when he entered two pigs in the FFA show at the Lancaster Stock Yards. He says he was a bit nervous then, and claims it's a similar situation now. Nevertheless, the Solanco sophomore is anxious to compete and looks forward to going. He remembers that at the FFA round-up his jitters left him once he was in the ring.

Like his first reserve champion; the two hogs he'll be showing next week are three-way crossbreds. He selected them out of Harry Kreider's herd, who, like Mike, once had his main interests in dairy cows. Kreider sold his dairy operation several years ago and now specializes in pigs. Bringing his two pigs home at eight weeks of age, the pair weighed in the neighborhood of 35 pounds each. Three weeks ago they weighed in at 175 and 195. Mike's hoping for 230 pounds on each animal when they're weighed in at the Farm Show. "They have to weigh in between 190 and 250 pounds to be eligible for the show," the young man explained.

Purchased last Summer, Mike's two pigs were not originally intended for showing. At least not the kind of show they're going to now. Last Fall these same two pigs were cuddly members of the children's barn yard at the Solanco

Fair. They got petted and picked up and chased and their squeals mixed with those of the children. That was the idea behind their purchase. Dr. Fredd made the suggestion, although Mike himself did the selecting.

One of the developments in Mike's relatively short FFA career which may have been an influence in getting him interested in hogs is the fact that he has consistently done well in swine judging. Hogs have become a challenge to him.

Mike and his parents have never kept hogs up until now. The FFA projects have therefore become a real learning experience for both him and his father, who admits he finds the creatures and their management to be interesting.

Among the reasons Mike prefers hogs to cows is that they don't take quite as much time, and they eat less. Preparations for showing are also not near as tedious as they are with larger livestock. He works with his two hogs for approximately 30 minutes each evening. Using a cane, he walks them around the concrete barn yard to help build up good hams. Another phase of the training program involves holding them in place. He strives for good discipline without roughness.

Mike's two show animals eat approximately 150 pounds of a commercial pelleted ration per month. The heavier of his two hogs gets less grain, and a little hay instead to "keep him happy." He's trying to avoid overfattening them.

The end result will hopefully be an animal which is just what the judge has in mind. According to Mike, who in the last six month has learned a lot about showing, and has had a fine swine judging record besides, the judges look for a long-bodied hog, properly arched from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail, with firm round hams, and not too much weight in the forequarters.



Mike Rhoads purchased his first pigs in the Spring of 1976. Less than a year later, he's taking two hogs to the Farm Show.

Potatoes shown

ALLENTOWN, Pa. - Not only is Lehigh County on the top with the grand champion potato exhibit at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show, but also the number of exhibits of the "Beautiful Spud" from Lehigh keeps the Potato Show active.

Several potato farms from Lehigh County have been the backbone of the State Show. The 32 tuber tray, one exhibit, is displayed with all other potatoes in the front foyer, west end, near the vegetable display and the hay and grain show.

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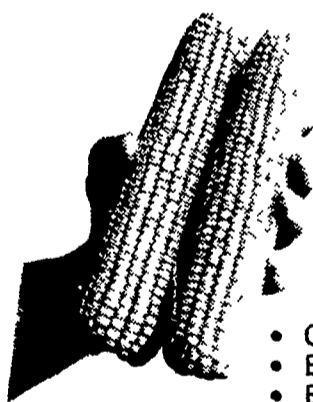
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