

# Pregnancies checked electronically

By DIETER KRIEG  
**PARADISE** - Imagine checking 100 sows for pregnancy in 20 to 30 minutes. It's possible and nearly 99 per cent accurate with an electronic device which works on a sound wave principle.

Although such a sophisticated instrument was considered to be out of the realm of most swine breeders until just a few months ago, the hand-carried pregnancy probe has gone the way of the digital wrist watch and electronic pocket calculator. In other words, they've come down in price, and are thus an item of economic consideration on many farms.

One hog operation in this area which uses the device is Jet Age Swine Breeders, near here, owned by John Hess. Abe Fisher, president of the Lancaster County Hog Producers, is manager at the farm. During a recent visit with Lancaster Farming's editor, Fisher revealed that the lower cost pregnancy testers retail for around \$500 to \$600 now. Just a year ago they approached \$1000. The model used at Jet Age Swine Breeders is a little more sophisticated than most and cost \$1600 a year ago. A similar model can be purchased today for around \$1265.

How does such an electronic pregnancy tester work? Fisher, who is involved in marketing the product, explains that it is based on reflections of ultrasonic sound waves. The more expensive models can be used to determine pregnancies in hogs and sheep, as well as measure backfat, muscling, and similar traits. All the operator has to do is hold a probe up to the lower, right rear abdomen, press a button, and take a reading on the scale. In a matter of

seconds you know whether she's pregnant or not. What's more, it's nearly fool-proof. Out of more than 1000 head Fisher has tested to date at this farm, only 12 turned out to be false readings.

Fisher says he wouldn't want to be without one of the devices, which he claims is generating interest from a number of hog breeders in the area, including the Amish. "It tightens your reign on the sow herd, keeps your costs down, saves feed, and you make better use of your available space," Fisher commented.

The earliest recommended day for using the tester is 30 days after breeding, according to manufacturers and experienced users. It's thought to be the earliest and most positive way of determining pregnancy, short of the obvious sign when a sow or gilt comes back in heat. But suppose you miss her signs of heat, then you lose a minimum of three weeks, reasons Fisher. The only other alternative the breeder has is to "eyeball check" the herd. Although some swine producers claim to be able to diagnose pregnancies in this fashion two months after breeding, it may well take three months or even longer. That too, accounts for a lot of wasted time, feed, space and money, Fisher declares.

The Lancaster County hog producer believes the electronic device is now within the range of the medium size operator. He recommends it for consideration to anyone who has 100 or more sows in his herd. Jet Age Swine Breeders has a herd of 500. Some claims have been made that the unit can be justified with as few as 50 sows.

The device is battery operated and may be charged on regular house current. Very portable and

compact, newer models are even equipped with a buzzer to tell you if she's bred or not. The more expensive models which may also be

used on sheep are accurate in that species after the 35th day. Demonstrating the gadget's use, Fisher lectured: "You place the probe

right in front of the flank, three inches above the teat line." There's no penetration or pain involved. Sows don't even appear irritated by it.

According to Fisher, the pregnancy probe is of more use to a man who has his sows and gilts bred in a pen, rather than the manager who prefers the stall method. He feels it's "very necessary" in an operation such as his where 150 sows

are pen-bred per any given cycle.

"Gilts are a different story, too," Fisher continued. They come into heat any time during the 21-day period the boars are in with them. Sows, on the other hand, generally come into heat a couple of days after breeding, giving the owner a narrower time period during which to check them for pregnancy.



Abe Fisher can pregnancy check a sow in about 10 to 15 seconds.



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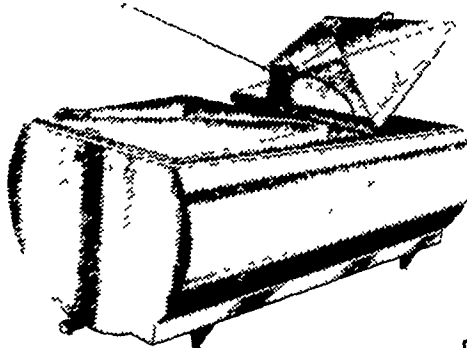
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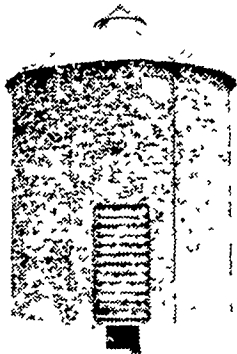
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