

# New swine confinement system studied in Del.



Swine research associate Ralph Lowe holds the snout of one of the Substation Swine Unit's new gilts while his assistant, Kip Foskey, earmarks her for identification purposes. The unit's 64 gilts arrived the week after Thanksgiving and have all been bred for a Spring farrowing.

DOVER, Del. — Delaware swine producers have become more sophisticated in recent years, graduating from the "woodlot" type of operation — practiced by the all-purpose farmers who kept a few feeder pigs rooting around the barnyard — to the "confinement" system, in which all or part of the operation is enclosed in buildings.

This new system allows farmers to specialize in swine production, giving them better control of the breeding, gestation and farrowing of their hogs. But the idea of raising hogs completely indoors is new to many Delaware farmers and the confinement system is not without problems.

Thus, it assists those swine producers now wishing to upgrade their operations and to demonstrate the myriad

new developments in swine production, the University of Delaware has designed and built a new Swine Research Unit at the University of Delaware Substation near Georgetown.

"The purpose of the unit is strictly functional," explains Extension livestock specialist Richard Fowler, who, along with a committee of swine producers led by William Gordy, Laurel, was instrumental in developing the unit. "We will be mainly demonstrating good swine production practices and trying to help Delaware farmers solve their practical production problems...we will not be doing basic research."

The unit was completed last fall and technically opened when Ralph Lowe, a young graduate of the University of Delaware's

College of Agricultural Sciences, was hired in October. But the unit really went into operation when the University's swine herd—60 gilts and six boars—arrived the week after Thanksgiving.

The feeder pig production unit, designed to hold a total of 84 sows, consists of two 10-crate farrowing rooms, a nursery and a breeding and gestation house. It also has a flush waste system with

lagoons which serve as a research disposal system.

"Delaware has had a shift in intensity of hog production," says Fowler. "Producers have gone from a low capital investment with little or no equipment to a more intense operation with confinement buildings. And when the farmers spend the money for these facilities, they must expand production and sell more pigs in order to pay for it."


(Turn to Page 13)

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