

Bill Fisher

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appear inside this edition of Lancaster Farming.

Upon graduation from Garden Spot High School in 1965, Fisher took on full-time employment at Stauffer Homestead Farms, near here, where his father, Earl, is overall manager. The younger Fisher is in charge of 125 sows, 25 gilts, several boars, and all of the young pigs which comprise the swineherd. In addition, he

has full responsibility of field work at the 380-acre estate, and works closely with his father in the decision making process. He also does all of the veterinary work with the beef breeding herd.

Fisher's interest in hogs has enabled him to increase the Stauffer Homestead swine herd from 40 sows in 1965 to 125 today. Two nurseries have been added to the

operation to help improve litter averages and performance. As many as 1800 feeder pigs are marketed annually. Most of them are sold privately to area farmers. Some 200 stay on the farm, and the remainder are sent to local auctions.

"We raise all of our own replacement gilts," the award winning pork producer continued, "and we buy two boars a year" to bring in new blood. It's a program that has worked well, he concedes, although breeding problems plague

him each year, particularly during the Winter months.

"Some of our sows aren't getting bred when I want them to, and that leads to further complications all the way down the line. It upsets farrowing schedules and it costs extra money to keep and feed them," the young man explained. Fisher believes part of the problem is the weather and general conditions outside. Although he is thinking seriously of building indoor breeding facilities, his sows are still bred outdoors. He runs one boar per pen of four sows.

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Pigs have been Fisher's number one interest in agriculture and he looks to a bright future of the business in Lancaster County and neighboring areas. "The hog industry here has just begun," he says confidently. His reasons are that Lancaster County is close to the markets, hogs will work well into any operation as "an extra," and they offer a better balance of cash flow. "I look for swine production to go the same route as poultry production did," he predicts. Some of the changes he foresees for the Pennsylvania pork industry are more confinement setups and sharpened management abilities.

The hog industry, Fisher admits, can't complain about prices right now. In fact, he believes that if anything, producers should possibly be concerned about prices being a bit on the high side. "Anything over 40 cents is a good price for hogs," he continued, "and at 50 cents and cheap corn, we're talking of potential disaster in a couple of years," he added.

The keys to success in the hog business are a willingness to work extra hours when the herd demands it, paying attention to details, and having the sows in the right flesh condition at farrowing time, said Fisher. As Pennsylvania's only Pork All-American for 1978 and being one of just 31 in the entire country this year, his opinions carry some weight. The young man is constantly on the lookout for better ways of management, breeding, feeding, and marketing. Most of his new information, he says, comes from reading magazines, and attending events such as the upcoming Lancaster County Swine Producers Day. He's willing to try ideas which he thinks might fit into his operation.

Among his chief aims for the near future are improvements in litter averages, faster gains, higher quality hogs, and more efficient feeding and breeding techniques. The present litter average is seven piglets per sow. His farrowing schedule allows for two litters per sow per year. To improve his feeding

program, he feeds his sows in individual stalls during the first and last months of their gestation period. "These are the most critical months," the Pork All-American explained.

Ideally, Fisher likes to keep his sows on a 4-week farrowing schedule throughout the year, except in December, which he skips because of the cold weather. Breeding difficulties throw that schedule off somewhat, he admitted.

Despite his breeding problems, Fisher still finds it more economical to keep a sow in the herd, rather than begin anew with a fresh gilt. "As long as a sow is giving me good litters and she's not too far off schedule, I'll keep her for as many as 16 to 18 litters," he commented.

For his replacement gilts, the Lancaster County swine breeder works primarily with purebred Hampshire sows bred to crossbred or purebred boars. He prefers the white breeds and claims there's a premium for them at the market.

Sows which have given birth to litters stay in their crates for up to three weeks. Fisher allows them access to the outdoors daily for feeding. They're limit fed, receiving no more than 10 pounds of a grain ration per day for the duration of their lactation. The feed mixture, which is composed largely of home-raised crops and ground and mixed right at the farm, consists of 250 pounds of a 40 per cent protein concentrate, 200 pounds of alfalfa hay, and 1550 pounds of ground corn per ton. The protein supplement is balanced for minerals and vitamins. The ration has worked satisfactorily for Fisher for 12 years and remains largely unchanged. "I won't change it unless I feel it isn't working," he told Lancaster Farming.

Upon release from the farrowing crates, the sows and respective litters are moved to one of the two nursery facilities. Each pen is spacious enough to accommodate two sows and their litters. They remain here for another five to seven weeks, after which time the sows are moved out to pasture and bred several days later.

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EARLY BIRD

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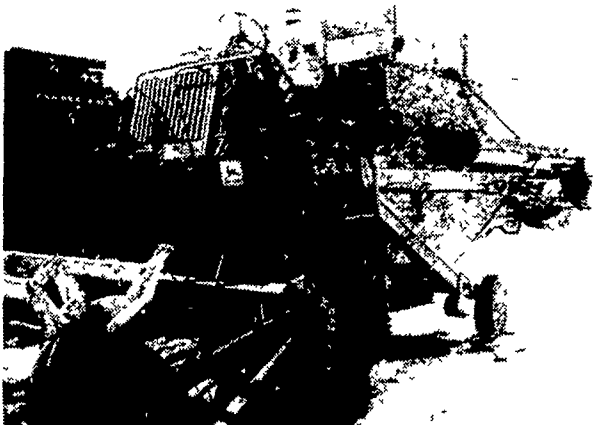
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