

Reproductive efficiency key in swine breeding

By JOANNE SPAHR
LANCASTER -- The purebred swine industry needs to put more emphasis on reproductive efficiency and must base its selection of stock on good sow lines, says Dwight Younkin, Penn State Extension swine specialist. Speaking to a gathering of hog growers at the recent Lancaster County swine day, Younkin made the point that while the swine industry has taken great strides in improving carcass characteristics in recent years, it has stood still or possibly regressed in the area of reproductive efficiency.

"In this area, the swine industry hasn't changed much over the past 30 years," exclaimed Younkin. "We just haven't put the emphasis on really selecting for reproductive efficiency."

To stress his point, he showed the group a sale catalogue. Typically, it contained herd sire references but no dam references.

"The purebred industry must put much more emphasis on this," he stated firmly.

Characteristics which Younkin advised the group to look for in sow lines are easy breeding, early sexual maturity, easy farrowing

ability, good dispositions, easy adaptation to environment, good underline, and good underpinning.

"Your replacement gilts should come from this type of sow line," he stated.

Good management of replacement gilts is also important to reproductive efficiency, he said. To emphasize early sexual maturity, Younkin suggested taking the gilts off growing/finishing units at five to five-and-a-half months of age and putting them in a pen beside a boar. Within 10 days to two weeks after they have been exposed to the boar, they should cycle. Those that don't should be culled.

"Twenty per cent of the gilts you raise in your lifetime won't settle — and those don't cycle. So, if these young gilts don't cycle within the two week period, cull them," Younkin advised.

He also suggested limiting feed and trying to get the females bred at approximately eight months of age or about the time they have their third cycle.

According to Younkin, one of the main problems in breeding efficiency is mismanagement of boars.

"Not enough boar power is the problem," he stated.

His advice to the hog growers is to get a good aggressive boar, and not to always look for the biggest boar available, since that animal could be the slowest sexually maturing.

Other traits to look for in the male animal are a good underline and good underpinning.

Continuing on the topic of boars, Younkin told the group, "I'd like to see more information on sow references for reproduction — get all the records you can on the boar."

As far as management of the male is concerned, Younkin advised the group to buy boars at six months of age, take them home, get them adapted to the new environment, and then try them out.

"Start mating him at seven to eight months of age and make sure he mates properly," notes Younkin, adding that checking the animal before he is needed is one way to find out if he has problems with his reproductive tract.

Management of the breeding herd is also a key factor in reproductive efficiency.

"One problem is that not enough time is spent with the breeding herd," Younkin told his audience. "I tell



Dwight Younkin

for the job to get done," stated Younkin. This area should be comfortable for both the sow and farmer.

Younkin also stated to the group that anyone with a good size number of sows should have an ultrasonic pregnancy checker which research has found to be 96 to 98 per cent accurate.

"They're not that expensive," he said, "and they're pretty accurate."

According to Younkin, there is no one particular type of sow confinement which is better than another. The main ingredient is management, so he told the group to choose the system which is best for them in the case of housing and feeding.

However, there are a few basics which should be followed.

In tight quarters, each individual sow must have a minimum of 16 square feet of space, must have water, and should have a warm spot out of the draft to prevent stacking up.

In Summer the breeding herd should be kept cool, especially in the case of boars since they can become sterile for a period of weeks if they become too hot.

"In late July, August and September we typically find

a low conception rate," noted Younkin.

Sows should also be kept cool up to three weeks after cycling.

For disease control Younkin advised the audience to subject one segment of the breeding herd to the total breeding herd so that they can exchange organisms and build up immunities.

"It takes two or three weeks for sows to build up immunities after they have contact," explained Younkin, "so all this should be done three weeks ahead of time."

To conclude his presentation, Younkin again advised the group to keep better records and to base the selection of the herd on good sow lines.

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...remember to say thank you

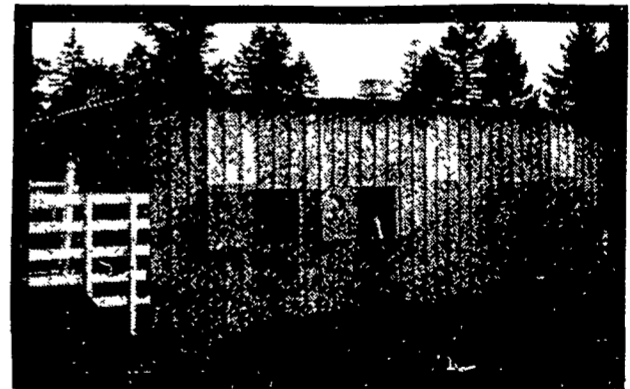
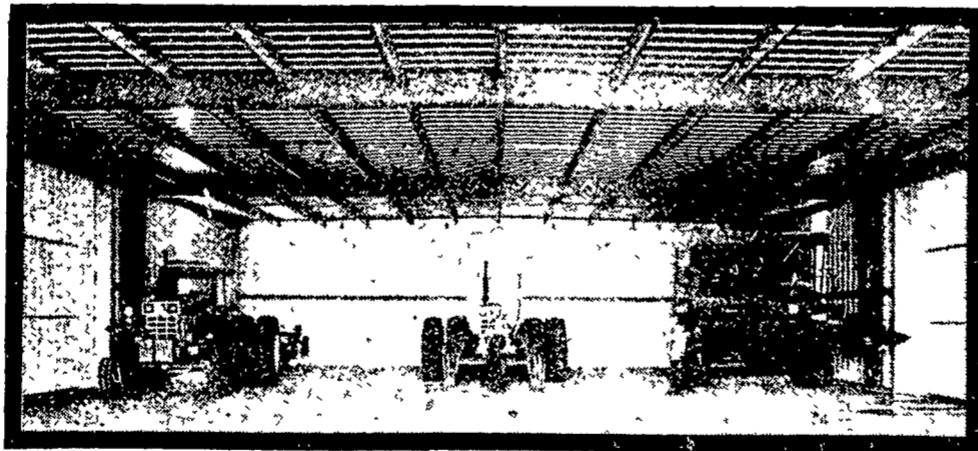
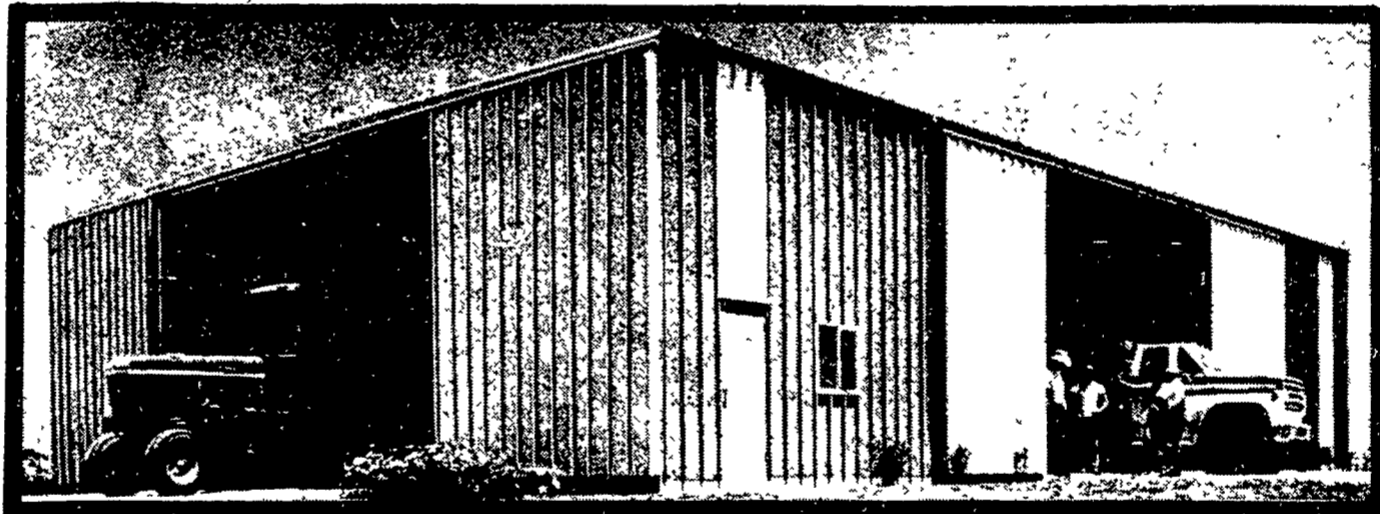
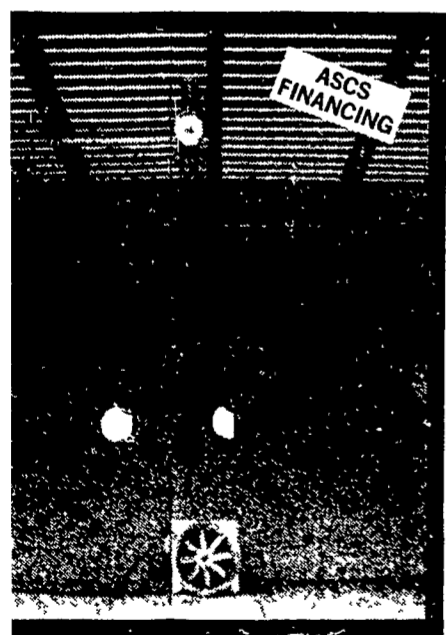
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