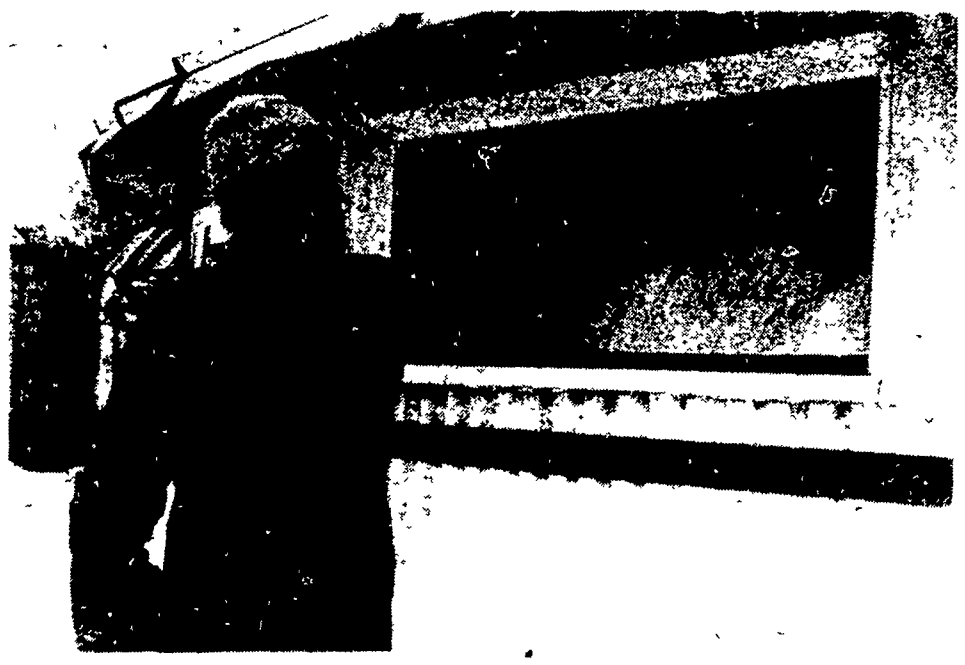
Hogs going in circles in new, round finishing barn

Wilson Rohrbach, right, and son Roy of Mertztown, Berks County have constructed the first round finishing barn for hogs of its type in Pennsylvania. The fully-insulated metal building uses a conventionally-sized grain bin roof for its design and construction.



There are no fans in the building, just the wooden vent doors that can be adjusted to control air movement and temperature.

The Yorkshire crossbreds line up at the feed bunk and waterers. The entire unit revolves around the concrete pad, scraping the manure into a gutter and out to an underground holding pit. No hand scraping is required, Rohrbach said.

BY SHEILA MILLER

MERTZTOWN — For hog producers who feel like they're going in circles, here's something new — a round finishing barn.

Wilson Rohrbach, R1 Mertztown, recently constructed and put into operation the first round finishing barn of its kind in Pennsylvania.

This Berks County farmer, who has been raising hogs for 25 years, said he first learned about the round building after seeing it advertised in a Western magazine.

"I am feeding 102 head of three-way Yorkshire crossbreds on 615 square feet Half of the hogs are kept on one side of the feeders and half on the other," said Rohrbach as he threw a switch on the electrical box outside the Dutch door.

Quietly, the feed bunk and waterers began to rotate around the circular room The resting pigs stretched and snorted to their feet as the feed bunk glided towards them

Rohrbach explained this rotating system of feeders and waterers also contains an automatic manure scraper The 220 electic line energizes a 2 hp motor which runs two hydraulic motors — one motor drives the unit while the other drives the cleaning chain, he said

The manure is scraped off the concrete pad to the manure gutter on the outside wall of the production floor and flows to an under ground pit through two 6-inch PVC drains, Rohrbach added The unit makes its revolution in a minimum time of 7½ minutes

"The pit is designed to hold 10,000 gallons," Rohrbach said "We plan to pump it out in the spring and inject it right away"

Because of the solid concrete floor and the manure system in the round barn, Rohrbach noted there are no problems with gases as occurs in barns with slatted floors and pits

He pointed to the ten wooden vent doors which serve as the barns only ventilation

"There are no fans in the barn," he said, "just these doors and a roof cap that acts like a chimney So far we've kept the temperature inside between 60 and 65 degrees without having to close the vents completely"

Wilson demonstrates the crank he invented and patented to raise and lower the cap at the top of the circular building's roof.

Rohrbach then walked to a crank attached to the lower edge of the roof He smiled as he explained this was his own patented idea

"I can turn this crank and open the roof cap without ever going inside the barn," he said "With this crank and the rotating manure scraper, there really isn't any reason to go in at all, unless something should go wrong with the mechanics

Rohrbach explained the 102 head barn is the only size available at the present time

"I understand they had made a round insert for a square building that housed 400 hogs, but there was too much lost space and expense," he said "I guess what has prompted this size is this building uses a conventional diameter 30-foot grain bin roof"

The overall height of the fully-insulated building is 14 feet tall, with each of the curved wall panels measuring 7 feet by 7 feet

The walls are constructed of metal, Rohrbach said, with the inside wall made of a hard plastic-like material to keep the pigs from "getting a hold and tearing it loose" He added the walls were set up in an hour's time when the building was constructed this past August

The Berks farmer noted the cost of the building was $10,000. But until it was set up on 12 yards of concrete the cost came to $15,000

Along with the new building, Rohrbach said he is excited about his new fiberglass feed bin

"It's supposed to keep the same temperature inside as the outside temperature This will be a big improvement over our old metal bins where the bin would get hot in summer and sweat with the change in weather Under those conditions, the feed just didn't stay the same Rohrbach exclaimed

Feeding a mix of corn, raised on 150 acres of land, and soybean meal, purchased from a local feedmill Rohrbach makes his own pork-producing ration, supplemented with a medicated commercial premix

With high hopes for his new round building, Rohrbach said he plans to get his feeder pigs from 46 pounds to market weight in 90 days

The round building is designed to house 102 hogs, with half staying on one side of the revolving unit and half on the other.