

Brief answers
to short questions

Sheila's Shorts

By Sheila Miller



Whadayacallit?

Words — the English language is full of them. But there are times when our dictionaries seem to be missing some important combinations of letters that can say exactly what we had in mind.

Modern English is sometimes diluted with slang and jargon from various sectors of society, and as time replaces the writers and linguists of previous generations, some of the words are lost — they become obsolete through misuse or neglect.

As an agricultural writer, it's important to know the proper terminology of the profession. Knowing a duck from a drake, a goose from a gander, a ewe from a ram, and a mare from a stallion are expected of the on-farm writer. And, for me, the terminology is usually second nature.

Even as a child, I'd have to giggle when someone mistakenly referred to a bull as a "cow." And the bovine "facts of life" were learned at an early age as Dad explained the difference between a bull calf and a heifer calf and how quickly the bull calf could become a steer. Helping to care for our herd of commercial Hereford cattle gave me the lessons in farm-talk and identification that seem almost innate now.

Pigs are another story, however, since my parents stopped raising them when my sister and I were small. I was familiar with the proper use of the words boar and sow, but the words gilt and barrow only cropped up years later in my

ag education. And, what do you call a bunch of pigs, besides herd? Is there another word?

Well, folks, that's the question I received from Space Farms Zoo and Museum, R6 Box 135, Beemerville Road, Sussex, N.J. 07461.

Quite frankly, I never heard of a group of swine being called anything but a herd. But, I decided to check with some experts.

I contacted the president of the Pennsylvania Swine Producers Cooperative who unfortunately has no further enlightenment for me. Neither did Penn State's Animal Science Department.

Not giving up, I gave the question to the news editor of our sister publication, The Litzitz Record. Her brother happens to be a crossword puzzle expert and creator.

After a quick telephone call to her sibling, she shared several new terms with me, gleaned from a trivia encyclopedia and a crossword puzzle dictionary.

How do you like the term "sunder"? This word is used in describing a herd of wild boars. Or, how about "drift"? That means a drove or herd, especially when talking about hogs. These two are new ones to me.

The only familiar word is "brood" used in talking about baby pigs, offspring still under the care of the mother.

So, take your pick — sunder, drift, brood, or herd. But remember, not everybody carries a pocket trivia encyclopedia or

crossword dictionary when visiting a zoo. Language, it must be remembered, is conveying thoughts and ideas through words, hopefully for everyone's understanding.

Corn Silage Equation

For anyone interested in the mathematics of calculating the monetary value for a ton of corn silage, Penn State concocted a formula.

According to Harold Harpster, the formula is:

Multiply the price of No. 2 shell corn by the grain content of the silage (about 5½ to 6 bu/ton in this area). Add to that the cost of harvesting the silage, an extra

\$3.50 on the average.

To determine the grain content of the silage, divide the normal yield of corn grain (bushels per acre) by the tons of silage harvested on that acre.

Working through an example, Harpster suggested the price of No. 2 shelled corn to be \$3.50 a

bushel. If the grain equivalent of the silage was 6 bushels per ton, then the equation would figure out to \$21 per ton. Added to that would be the cost of harvesting for a total of \$24.50 per ton of silage.

Any questions? Please call Penn State or your Extension agent — I always hated math.

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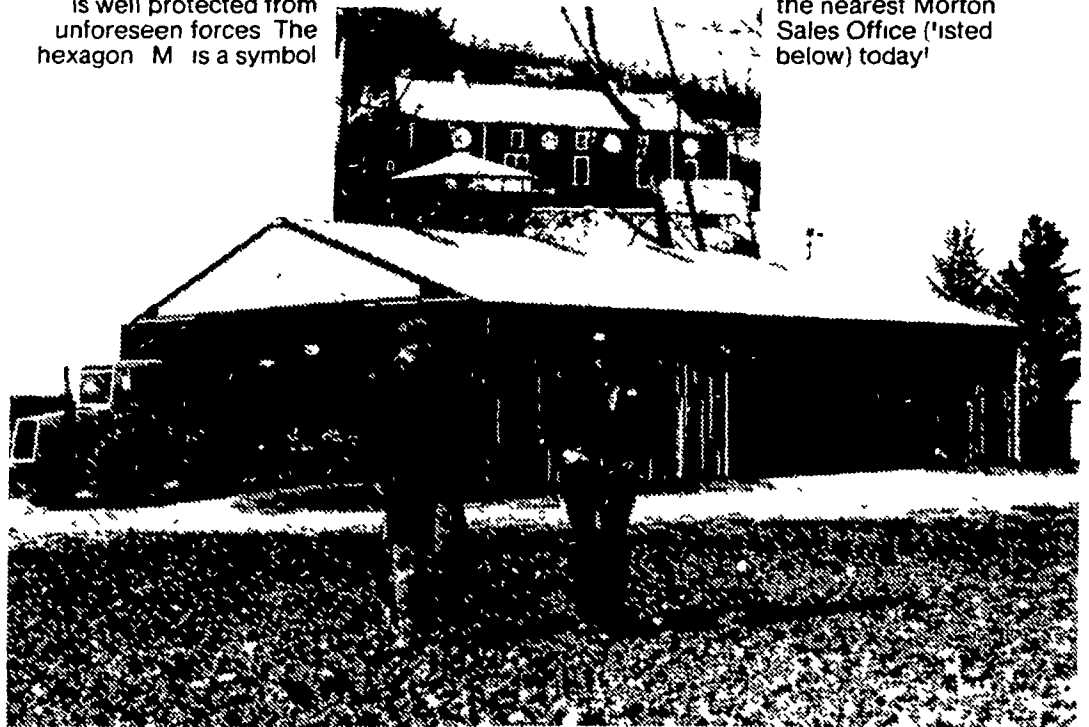


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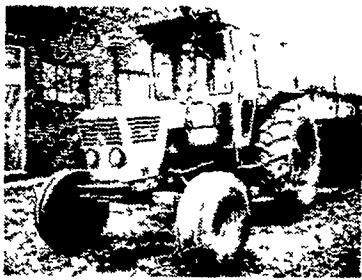
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