

# Abe Hess: raising production barrow champions

BY LAURA ENGLAND

CONESTOGA — What does it take to produce a well-dressed, market quality hog?

Ask Lancaster County swine producer Abe Hess, of R1 Conestoga. Hess recently won the champion production barrow award of the 1983 Lancaster-Chester Hog Carcass Show. In fact, all four of his entries placed in the top ten - first, third, fourth and sixth.

Hess' champion barrow weighed 70 pounds at the onset of the 106-day production test. The animal finished out at 270 pounds with an average daily gain of 1.89 pounds, the highest ADG recorded among the 23 entries.

The overall production barrow index for the hog was 103.2. This number was determined based on the following test results: a carcass weight of 204.5 pounds; a fat index of 1.0; a loin eye area of 6.90 inches; a body length of 34.1 inches; and a muscle percentage of 42.0.

Hess, who's been raising hogs in his farrow to finish operation for 25 years, said this is the best he's done in the contest. Last year, he owned the champion barrow on foot which is selected by visual appraisal.

Over the years, Hess said he's improved the quality of his barrows through selection of quality breeding stock. He owns five boars - one Yorkshire, two Hampshires and two Durocs - all which he purchased. He crossbreeds these with his predominately Yorkshire sow herd, depending on the cross and quality he hopes to achieve.

Hess markets his hogs year-round and has set up his breeding program so sows are farrowing every seven to eight weeks. "I run

the sows in three groups," Hess explained, "and by the time the third group is ready to farrow, the first group is ready to move out to the gestation barn."

The three groups of sows average from 24 to 30 animals per group. They are bred naturally with two services per sow. Hess tries to have the groups bred within a week, allowing the sows to farrow about the same time.

When breeding for replacements, Hess breeds his Yorkshire sows to his Yorkshire boar. "Yorkshires have a good mothering ability," he said, "and they tend to have larger litters than Hampshires or Durocs."

Hess crossbreeds for his market hogs to get the best of both breeds. With crossing, a farmer gets an animal with more muscling and finishing ability, Hess said.

Litter sizes normally run from 10 to 14 piglets, Hess said, and weaning from nine to 10 is considered good. The piglets are weaned at seven weeks and are then moved from the farrowing house into the fattening barn. There, the animals stay until five or six months of age when they reach desired market weight.

Hess finishes out his hogs from 220 to 225 pounds. To reach this weight, the hogs are fed a strong protein diet during the first half of growth and are switched to a lower protein diet during the second half.

The feed is a mixture of Purina supplement and corn. Hess buys the commercial supplement, grinds it and mixes it with corn he grows on his 110-acre farm, appropriately named Bacon Acres. For the starting ration, 800 pounds of supplement is mixed with 1,200 pounds of corn. For finishing, the ration is 600 pounds of supplement to 1,400 pounds of corn.



An open front swine barn houses Abe Hess' 80-sow herd and five boars. Hess said this type of housing is popular in southern states.

Hess fattens about 450 hogs at any one time and markets 20 to 25 animals per week. The hogs are sold at local auctions on a visual grade basis.

Hess, his wife Janie, who is a part-time school bus driver, and five children provide the backbone for the hog operation. Management practices include keeping birth and breeding records. No records are kept on average daily gains, Hess said.

When piglets are two to three weeks old, they are castrated. Their teeth are also clipped to keep them from cutting each other or their mothers, and they are also given iron shots.

The piglets and their mothers are kept separately by litters in six-foot wide pens each with a two-foot wide farrowing crate. Twenty-four pens are placed in the farrowing house which was converted from a tobacco shed about 18 years ago, Hess said.

During gestation, the sows are housed in an open-front barn that Hess built six years ago. The boars are also housed in this barn and receive the same feed mixture as the sows. Sows are fed, ad lib, four to five pounds each per day depending on their gestation cycle.

The finishing pens, built inside a bank barn, hold from 75 to 100 pigs each. The pigs are divided among the 13 pens based on age and weight. They are also fed on an ad lib basis.

In addition to raising hogs, Hess does custom silo filling for area farmers. He owns his own harvesting equipment and chops mainly corn silage crops. He also



The sows divided into groups of five to eight per pen and have free movement inside their 8 by 30 foot pens.



In his farrow to finish hog operation, Hess breeds his sows to farrow every seven to eight weeks.

grows alfalfa and raises steers which his children use as 4-H projects.

Future goals for Bacon Acres are to increase the herd size and to produce barrows of the same

quality that qualified Hess' entry for the champion production barrow honor awarded by the Lancaster and Chester County Swine Producers Association.

## Potter Holstein club elects

GENESEE — Larry Specht, Penn State dairy science specialist, was guest speaker at the annual meeting of the Potter County Holstein Club on Monday at Penn Valley Resort, Genesee. He explained the new linear program scoring of dairy cattle and how it compared with the former classification system.

Approximately 50 persons attended the buffet dinner and meeting. Kevin Risser and Jack Thomas, whose terms as directors had expired, were re-elected. Elected as officers for 1984 were Dennis Smoker, Genesee,

president; Kevin Risser, Coudersport RD, vice president; Jack Thomas, Ulysses, secretary-treasurer; Jay Gooch, Coudersport RD, state director and membership chairman; Dennis Smoker, show chairman; Jack Thomas, youth chairman, Tom Kibbe, Harrison Valley RD, special activities chairman, and Jay Gooch, sales chairman. Samuel M. Crossley, county extension director, was named publicity chairman and Dan Rice and Ivan Kibbe Jr., are also directors.



Abe Hess, R1 Conestoga, stands inside his farrowing house.



Sows remain with their piglets for up to seven weeks in the farrowing pens.