

Pork producer promotes his product with 'pignics'

BY SALLY BAIR
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MECHANICSBURG — Cumberland County Pork Producer Kent Strock believes every farm should promote what he produces. For Kent, that means promoting his favorite food - pork.

He and his wife, the former Raelene Harbold of Lancaster County, offer a "scent-sational pignic" for a taste treat. Kent and Raelene will roast a whole hog for "pignics" and it is always a crowd pleaser.

In 1982 Kent and Raelene had 15 pig roasts for friends and others; in 1983 they gave 21, and this year they have over 24 scheduled and will be feeding about 3,300 people. Asked why they have become so popular, Kent says simply, "Once you taste one, you want to have one."

Indeed, the succulent roast pig coming off the spit after 6 to 12 hours of cooking over charcoal is a tasty meal. Kent says, "The fact

that it's done over charcoal, slowly, makes it more tender and juicy than ordinary pork roasts. The ham, the loin and the shoulder all taste the same - they have pork flavor and that's appealing."

While pig roasts are becoming increasingly better known here. Kent first learned of them when he was teaching at Austin Community College in Minnesota. He said, "We heard of it, and then rented a roaster. We raised our own pigs, so if people bought the pig, we'd roast it. We did it in the summer when I was teaching, so it worked out well."

When they returned to Cumberland County, Kent borrowed some ideas from the roaster he had used in Minnesota, and proceeded to build one with the help of his father. "It took a long time," he recalls. "We started with a 275-gallon fuel tank and an idea. We worked on it whenever there wasn't a lot of farm work."

Kent and his father Clyde have a



Part of the delicious taste of pig roasts comes from the charcoal. The amount of charcoal needed varies with the weather, and Kent stays at the "pignic" site throughout the day, adding charcoal as necessary to keep the roaster hot.

commercial farrow to finish operations, Strocklyn Farms, just outside of Mechanicsburg on Williams Grove Road, with 80 sows. The elder Strocks also raise 3,300 turkeys, processing and retailing them from the farm.

Very strong in his commitment to the pork industry, Kent feels his pig roasting business is just one good way for him to take his message to the public. "I figure it's part of my job as a hog farmer. It is like someone advertising breeding stock or going to a hog show. I think it is good 'PR' for the pork industry." Furthermore, he adds, "I enjoy it."

Kent has also found it profitable, but points out that it requires a large time commitment, especially on weekends because that's when most pignics are scheduled. There is also a substantial investment whether you purchase a commercial roaster or devise your own. A lot of people use 55 gallon drums for small pig roasts, but they just are not adequate for large roasts.

Kent and Raelene work together when they put on a roast. The work begins from 6-9 hours before the scheduled eating time, depending upon the size of the pig and the weather. Because of the size of their operation, Kent says they can provide almost any size pig any time of the year. He has the hog dressed by a butcher.

There is no "normal" size of hog they use for cooking. Kent says they plan one pound of carcass per person, and about 1/2 pound per child. "That way you always have extra," Kent states. He said he now can choose a live pig to within 4-5 pounds of the carcass weight he desires.

Kent drives the spit of the rotisserie through a shoulder bone and a leg bone to secure it, and has designed prongs to hold the rest of the carcass in place as it slowly rotates. He and Raelene put the spit in the roaster at the site of the picnic, then Raelene usually returns home and he stays to "baby-sit" the pig while it cooks.

The job of the baby-sitter is to check the roast, and its internal temperature, and add charcoal as the day progresses. Kent points out that the weather affects the time it takes to complete a roast. On cool days it takes more charcoal, and it could make a difference of 20-30 pounds of charcoal.

If the roast is to be served at lunch, it may mean getting up at 2

a.m. to get it started. Sometimes that means the "sitter" can take a nap in the van. Usually the long hours during the day are passed by catching up on reading newspapers and magazines, and Kent says he likes to talk with people while he waits and watches he doesn't leave it unattended.

The oven that Kent has built is attached to a trailer for ease of travel. It has a side opening, and two large charcoal trays to hold the coals. A 1/10 horsepower motor turns the spit.

The trailer is built with a wide platform on either side, which gives space to rest the finished pig on while the carving takes place. Taking the pig off the spit draws a

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Kent offers tidbits to waiting bystanders as he carves the pig. It is the moment all have been waiting for once the pig is lifted out of the oven. "Oooh, it's good!" is the most frequent comment heard as they eat the succulent pig.

Homestead Notes



These crafts give some hint to the variety of corn crafts which will be on display during the Shippensburg Corn Festival next weekend. Here, Dot Ocker shows some of her creations.



Raelene wears her "Scent-sational Pignic" shirt and a sturdy denim apron as she and Kent begin to carve the carcass for eating. It takes from 30-45 minutes to reduce the pig to fat and bones.