

# Arnolds aim to produce pigs that pay their way

BY JACK HUBLEY

**LEBANON** — If you're a junior swine exhibitor and you're located in the southeastern part of the state, then chances are, you already know that Arnold Hog Farms is a good place to shop for show prospects.

The name actually applies to two separate farms. Leon Arnold raises Yorkshires and a few Landrace on his Lebanon farm, while his brother Larry produces Durocs over in Berks County.

This year Lancaster County showman Andy Groff took top honors in the county's FFA roundup with a pig sired by one of Larry Arnold's boars, and Groff's Lampeter Fair champion market hog was bought at Arnold's feeder pig sale. That sale also produced all four weight class champions and two reserve champs at the Lebanon Fair, as well as all of the 1985 Carbon County champions. At Lancaster County's Ephrata Fair the champion and reserve lightweight entries owned by Kevin Martin were also out of the same Arnold sale.

Some of the honors manage to stay in the family, as well. Last year, for instance, Leon's granddaughter, Shelby Heagy, took top honors at the Lebanon Fair as a first-year 4-H'er.

And at last Saturday's Lebanon County Roundup, two of Shelby's

four show prospects caught the judge's eye, one being named grand champion of the show, and a second qualifying for a trip to Farm Show next week.

Leon, whose top priority is producing purebred boars and crossbred females for commercial pork producers, spends little time in the showing. He does, however, see plenty of merit in the carcass shows where he can obtain cutout information on his entries.

At the 1985 Keystone International Livestock Expo, one of Arnold's entries proved to be more than just another pretty face, taking overall reserve grand champion carcass honors. At only 5½ months of age, the 245-pound hog registered a 6.3-inch loin eye with .7-inch backfat.

For Leon, the production of quality swine has been a lifelong enterprise, beginning nearly 40 years ago when he took a brood sow for his first FFA project. In 1973 the Lebanon County native bought his present farm and began turning the ex-dairy facility into a purebred swine operation.

The farm's dairy barn became a farrowing house with the addition of 18 crates. A Nebraska-style finishing building houses 560 head, with 35 pigs in each pen. Animals to be retained as breeders are taken out at 200 pounds and moved to a Cargill open-front breeding



Leon and Tom check their breeding stock, housed in this Cargill finishing building.



Leon Arnold (left) and son Tom keep the litters coming at Arnold Hog Farms. A 1981 Cedar Crest graduate, Tom plans a career in swine production.



At age four, Tom's son Jason already has his hand in the business. Here he offers a snack to Duke, one of Ohio Test Station's top indexing boars in '84.



Leon's granddaughter, Shelby Heagy, will be among the Farm Show contenders at next Thursday's Junior Market Swine Show.

building.

Rather than plunge "whole-hog" into the business, Leon has adopted a more prudent approach. "I made the pigs pay for all the buildings before I put them up," he says, emphasizing that no farming enterprise is worth the time and effort if it doesn't turn a profit.

Thus far, the Arnold business philosophy has proven to be right on target. At present, the Arnold operation farrows 160 litters a year. Five production sales are scheduled annually, with about 600 boars and 400 or more bred gilts going to commercial operations in Pennsylvania, New York and the New England states. A few hundred additional gilts are bred to order.

Production is the key to the commercial man's success, says Leon. "A sow has to raise a litter, or you're not going to be in business," he emphasizes. To that end, he finds Yorkshires to be the ideal mother breed. A prolific breed, Yorks milk well and have an excellent maternal disposition, says Leon.

Arnold pays close attention to his herd's genetics, canvassing the test stations for the top boars. Leon bought the top indexing York boar at Penn State's Performance Tested Sale in 1985, as well as the top indexing and selling boar in Ohio in 1984. This Ohio boar was ranked 11th among 600 York test station boars nationwide, says Leon.

The best, of course, doesn't come cheap, and Leon makes sure that a prospective herd sire meets his standards before a check is written. "A wide-chested pig is probably the most important," says Leon. "He has to be a well-muscled pig with a lot of freedom of movement," says the breeder, noting that a productive boar will be spending plenty of time on his feet.

One sire that comes close to Leon's ideal is his "Motor" boar, the sire of KILE's 1983 overall champion, as well as the 1985 overall on-rail champ. "He made us a lot of good pigs over the years," reflects Leon.

In KILE's junior show, Arnold-bred on-rail entries also took first-place lightweight honors, second in the mediumweight division and third among the heavyweights.

Leon's concern for producing genetics that yield a quality carcass has undoubtedly cost his family trophies in the showing. "Our pigs don't place well on foot," he says. "They come right out of the finishing barn. But if you condition them (he includes limit feeding and exercising as conditioning procedures) then you're not really learning anything."

Nevertheless, plenty of junior exhibitors have learned that attending an Arnold sale is a good way to get the show season off to a running start. In April of last year, for instance, the Arnolds sold 90 crossbreds and purebreds for swine projects.

What's the winning combination? "A Duroc boar and a York sow," says Leon. "Both have real good mothering ability, and you get a white offspring, which is what the packers want."

When it comes to litter size, Leon believes that quality—not quantity—is the way to go. "We ought to be making money on the pigs we have, and not trying to produce more pigs," he emphasizes. "We

like to wean 10 pigs per litter, and we've been pretty close to that," says Leon.

A 4-H leader for the past 28 years, Leon finds a market hog project to be ideal for young exhibitors. "A pig is a pretty efficient animal and makes a good short-term project," Leon says.

"In 90 to 120 days they'll (exhibitors) have their money back."

But whether their animals find their way to the showing or to the commercial producer's farrowing house, Arnold Hog Farms' emphasis will always be on the production of quality boars and gilts capable of bringing home the bacon for their owners.



Veteran Arnold sow, Lucy, has farrowed 215 pigs. She's littermate to Penn State's top indexing boar in 1979.