

# Steve Wilson Pork All American

JOYCE BUPP

York County Correspondent  
NEW FREEDOM (York Co.)  
— A devastating fire helped finalize a career decision for York County pork producer Steve Wilson.

When arson leveled his grandparent's barn in January, 1985, the flames destroyed more than a building for housing feed and machinery. Lost in the blaze were Steve Wilson's prized 25 sows and all his equipment to run the swine operation.

Having tended hogs since the purchase of his first 4-H swine project at age 10, Wilson saw years of effort wiped out. The bloodlines he had bred and tended through 4-H and FFA, the ongoing projects that had won him the FFA state production Award and the American Farmer degree lay in smoldering ash.

"At this point, I had to make a big decision, whether to rebuild new or discontinue," Wilson said. "I decided to rebuild a larger operation with help from my brothers Ron and Jeff."

That decision, and his management skills and pork industry involvement in the ensuing years, combined to earn Steve Wilson national recognition. In February, during the Keystone Pork Congress, Wilson was named a Pork All American winner.

In early June, Steve and his wife Cindy attended the World Pork Expo at the Iowa State Fairgrounds and he accepted his national award at the annual banquet. The Pork All American honor, sponsored by the National Pork Producers Association and Fermenta, Inc., recognizes individuals with outstanding qualities of leadership, production efficiency, and total contribution to the industry.

Wilson Brothers presently maintain a herd of 130 sows, primarily Yorkshires, Hampshires and Durocs, housed in a confinement system. Last October, Steve gave up off-farm employment to concentrate fulltime on the management and marketing for partnership's swine breeding business.



Wilson Brothers swine production operation at New Freedom is striving to produce pork and swine genetics to meet the changing, fat-conscious, consumer market.



Steve Wilson, left, accepted his 1992 Pork All American Award from National Pork Producers President Tim Rose.



A sizeable collection of trophies and plaques in Steve Wilson's barn office pay tribute to many years of showing and carcass class accomplishments.

Development of breeding stock plays a major role at the Wilson operation, with special focus on trait selections for an efficient, lean hog geared toward the end result: the fat-conscious consumer market. Toward that end, Wilson tries to utilize both testing and technology.

Wilson-bred boars are frequently enrolled in the Penn State testing program. Their three pens in the March-April test, boars which will sell during the Ag Progress test boar sale, finished second, eleventh, and twelfth out of 20 entries. The second-place pen was only one index point out of first spot in this test for efficiency indicators like backfat and weight gain.

A shelffull of trophies and numerous plaques on the wall of the office attest to the farm's showing and carcass-class accomplishments. But the quest for leanness and gain efficiency has not always put the farm's entries at the top of show classes.

In fact, at the 1990 KILE Yorkshire show, one of their entries stood 12 out of 12 in the showing.

But when the same carcass-class hogs were on the rail, the results took a dramatic turn for the Wilsons, who had 4 of the top 5. Their entries were also the leanest at the state Yorkshire show in March.

In quest for leaner, meatier hogs, Wilson utilizes the technology of ultrasound.

"It's one of the most accurate methods of evaluation," he said. A technician travels to the confinement system a couple of times yearly to do ultrasound evaluations on the loin eye of both boars and gilts.

"Why have a good boar and a fat gilt?" Wilson said, as he detailed the need to evaluate both paternal and maternal lines of seedstock and matings.

As with all livestock breeding operations, the search for better genetics is a continuing effort, sometimes utilizing videos to examine stock offered by distant breeders.

"I've bought stock out of Canada—they're ahead of us with a total hog index program for boars and gilts and can make more progress because they have more information," he said. "Canadian hogs have .5 to .7-inch of fat, while domestic ones have an inch of fat."

One Canadian-bred Yorkshire boar Wilson owns with two other breeders tests at a level of 4-inch of fat. Coupled with the goal of less fat is the search of hogs with larger loineyes.

"With the emphasis on lean meats, we think we're headed in the right direction," Wilson said. "We must continue to strive to make our market animal leaner without sacrificing a lot of other traits like muscling, soundness, growth, and efficiency."

To concentrate the genetics of lean, efficient boars, Wilson is increasingly using artificial insemination on the breeding herd. He built his own mounting device for collecting semen, which can be stored fresh for up to a week. Extended and stored at 62 degrees, the semen is also shipped overnight to distant customers.

"A.I. offers a potential for extra income to breeders and a way for other breeders to get better genetics without buying more boars. The genetics are here—we just need to make use of them," Wilson said.

An added bonus he sees in A.I. is eliminating the disease risk potential of moving new seedstock in with an established herd. The issue has become especially prevalent as pseudorabies continues to spread through swine herds in Pennsylvania.

A long-time tester of show and breeding stock animals, Wilson has become an outspoken advocate for stricter cleanup measures on pseudorabies-stricken herds. He was recently elected to represent the state's seedstock producers on the Pennsylvania Pseudorabies Advisory Committee to the

state Department of Agriculture.

While Wilson is concerned about loss of seedstock sales for the breeders he represents, he is equally worried over adverse consumer reaction to ongoing reports about pseudorabies. The disease carries no human health threat, yet one consumer approached him at a recent pork promotion to express concern about the safety of eating pork.

"Someone has to do it. I enjoy it, but it does take a lot of time. But there aren't a lot of full-time producers in this area to give their time," Wilson said of his increasing involvement in industry leadership activities, including the advisory board and numerous pork productions he helps to organize and carry out.

At a recent local promotion during Fawn Grove's Old Tyme Days, Wilson and other area pork producers sold 600 ham sandwiches. Sometimes they slice up fresh-roasted ham, cooked in its own juices, for their promotions.

"We have a good following," Steve said, recalling some loyal customers who hire a taxi to drive them from the city of York to ag events around the county where the pork specialties are being served. "And we want to get into more of these events. More and more non-farm people seem to be turning out for events like Old Tyme Days. Maybe more people are becoming aware of farm concerns and agriculture issues."

Funds raised through pork promotions go toward support for causes such as the 4-H judging teams, purchase of recipe handouts, and farmland preservation efforts.

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Steve Wilson scans the computer monitor for agriculture commodity and market prices from the Data Transmission Network (DTN), a North Dakota-based system.