

Pork Producers' Livelihood May Depend On Improving Herd Genetics

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Using the four-way cross gives producers "free use of the genetic base," said Stein.

Litter evaluations

He used an example of a herd, including 400 sows, and details of litter evaluations performed on it. Of an average litter, the farrowing rate was 88 percent, litter size per year was about 22.4, pigs weaned per mated female stood at 23.3, and the feed conversion was 2.73. "Most of the operations in the U.S. have a field conversion well over 3," said Stein.

The margin over feed costs on that particular herd was \$286,000, without building, taxes, and management costs.

"We have engineered animals that have a very fast turnaround," he said. His breeding company deals with days to slaughter of under 150, with a 24-day farrowing time. The target is 24 pigs per sow per year.

Stein said that his company has produced the top four herd sires in Canada. "It becomes a very small world as far as genetics is concerned," he said. Progeny is bred with backfat taken off—and backfat is a genetic trait that is readily passed on (about 50 percent heritability), along with loin eye, percent of ham, and percent of lean cuts. Meat color, marbling, and other factors are heritable.

The Canadian system has allowed the swine breeders to reduce backfat and growth rate considerably. In 1973, when they began serious strides into reducing backfat, their standard was .18 mm (or

.72 inch)—even now, in the U.S., the standard is above that.

"You can make very fast strides in producing the carcass traits and upgrading your animals to meet the standards of your packers today," he said.

Percent heritable

Reproductive traits are only about 10-15 percent heritable, but are important for litter survivability and increasing the amount per litter per herd.

Stein said intense genetic evaluations continue in Canada on all the genetic lines. Accordingly, what they found was that there will come a time, perhaps five years hence, when "intacts" (boars instead of barrows) will be sold at market. "The industry will probably move in that direction," said Stein.

"Intacts can be marketed without any (meat) taint to the consumer," he said. Pork surveys conducted in Australia and New Zealand proved there were no complaints from taint on the meat products from boars sold.

Also, placing boars on market provides a four percent advantage on meat cutout over a barrow, according to the Thames Bend owner.

Color tests

Other breeds studied include the Yorkshire (loin eye and other tests) and carcass comparison of cuts, including color structure tests important to many packers.

Producers can realize a cost benefit of up to \$30 on an average hog by using the proper genetics and

proper feeding. "If you feed good genetics, they respond," he said, pointing out the importance of feeding digestible lysine.

"To maximize genetics, it takes a number of combinations: management, nutrition, housing, and health," he said. The breeder said that each genetic line requires a

certain level of nutrition, and each requires it differently.

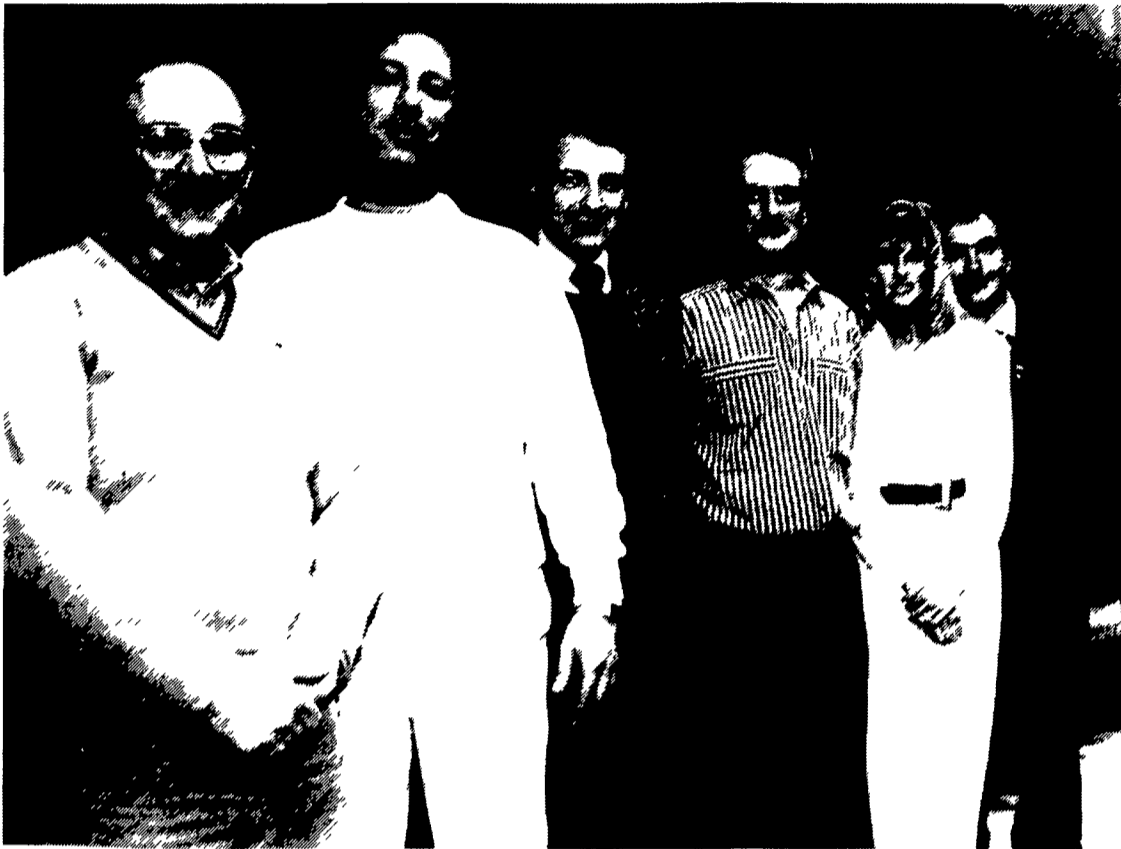
"If you want to maximize genetics, you must also feed that genetics," he said. "If you only feed it average, you will only get average results from your genetics. You can make very excellent genetics look very average."

Health concern

Health is the number one concern in Canada, according to Stein. "Without good health, the rest of it, you're throwing it away," he said.

It's also important to give growing pigs the proper square footage.

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Richard Stein, owner of Thames Bend Breeding Company, far right, spoke at the swine biotechnology meeting on Tuesday night at Ephrata High School. From left, Charles Ackley, Ephrata Area Young Farmer adviser; Tom Moyer, Hatfield Packing representative; Dr. Robert Graybill, swine practitioner; Mike Leininger, Thames Bend representative; Claudette Horst, Thames Bend representative; and Stein. Photo by Andy Andrews.

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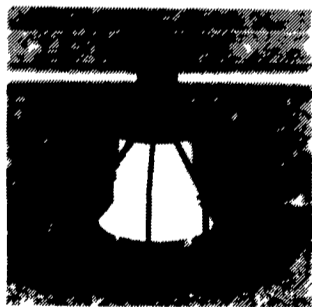
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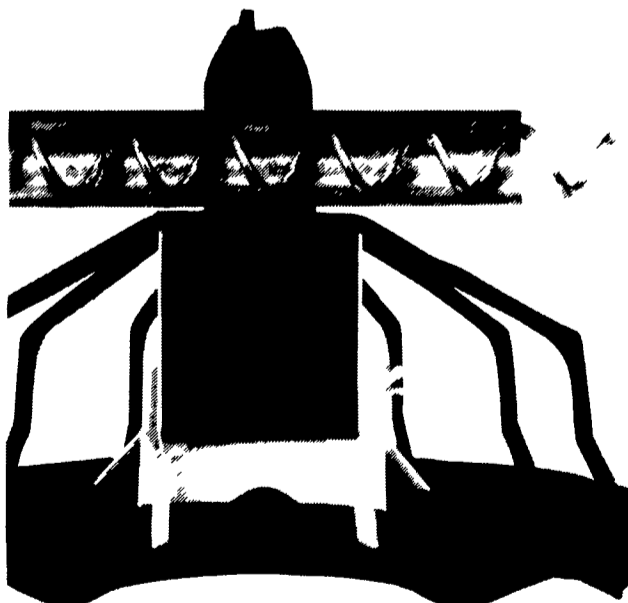


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