

# Kids Korner



A Charles "family portrait" of sorts — Crystal, 17, right, together with brothers Eric, 15, left, and Phillip, 11 and the hogs they will show at this year's Farm Show. They have lots of help from parents Cliff and Nancy.



Eric, center, and Phillip, right, both enjoy the showmanship championships. Keeping eye on the judge and making sure the hog isn't lost in some corner are what makes showing so much fun for them. Crystal, left, and Eric began showing about six years ago. "Dad had done it when he was young and he thought it was fun and wanted us to try it," said Crystal.

## Charles Family Returns To The Fun Of Farm Show

**ANDY ANDREWS**  
Lancaster Farming Staff  
LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)  
— "It's fun to see what you can do with what you have," said Crystal Charles.

Moments before, Crystal was busy using a cane, a bucket of feed, and a lot of coaxing to get her hogs set up at the edge of a wheat field for a "family portrait" of sorts — herself together with brothers Eric and Philip and the hogs they will show at this year's Farm Show.

Crystal, 17, was preparing for the junior swine show with brothers Eric, 15, and Phillip, 11, at their hog farm southwest of Lancaster. They have lots of help from parents Cliff and Nancy.

The Charles family spoke to

*Lancaster Farming* about the fun times they had showing pigs in years past. And they remembered a lot of fond shows — especially this year's West Lampeter Community Fair, where Philip won grand champion hog.

Of course, they remembered the competition at the Lancaster County 4-H Swine Roundup in August, too.

Crystal remembered her fondness for Lampeter. She won grand champion twice at the heralded farm show event for the county.

"But it doesn't matter whether you win or not," she said. "It's still a lot of fun."

Crystal and Eric began their 4-H show experience with the local fairs about six years ago. Since

then, they've attended the Farm Show a few times and placed high enough to have hogs sold between \$250-\$300 a head, according to their dad, Cliff.

The family is returning from a one-year absence from the Farm Show.

But they're returning to Farm Show in a big way.

Crystal believes the family has a "decent" shot at a high placing at this year's farm show. According to her dad, the hogs are different in terms of greater muscling, although a cross of York, Large White, Hamp, Duroc, and Pietrain is in the "mix."

They manage about 250 sows on the farrow-to-finish farm. From there, according to Crystal, her father helps pick the show pigs.

"We don't breed them for show pigs," he said. "It's our commercial hogs — we sell them to market. We breed them, but it's not like we decide which breeds to use. We buy our gilts and our boars, and whatever comes out of those we use."

"We just use what we have here," said Cliff.

Crystal said she and her brothers exercise the hogs every day.

"We just take them out every once in a while, like we did here today," she said. They walk the hogs "a few laps around the buildings," Eric said.

Crystal said the hogs are walked around the feed barns to build up their endurance. She said, "They usually stay together. They go crazy if they get by themselves."

It also helps to place them with other pigs, because in groups they are easier to manage, according to Crystal.

"Sometimes you have one that's kind of irritable and does what he wants," she said. "But most times they're easygoing."

When winning, the money from the ribbons and the sale goes into a pooled fund for Crystal, Eric, and Phillip. Then it is divided equally and placed in savings.

The 4-H'ers learn a lot about picking out hogs from being mem-

bers. They learn about "muscles, trim, and leanness," according to Eric.

4-H "tells you what to look for, but we grew up with it too," said Crystal.

Does she have a favorite show? "They're all a lot of fun. I like them all."

One year Crystal had a hog that simply grew too fast, which was disappointing because it didn't qualify. Last time at Farm Show, two years ago, none of the Charles made the sale. "We all came home, disappointed," said Crystal.

Eric and Philip both enjoy the showmanship championships. Keeping the eye on the judge and making sure the hog isn't lost in some corner are what makes showing so much fun for them.

Crystal and Eric began showing about six years ago. "Dad had done it when he was young and he thought it was fun and wanted us to try it," said Crystal. "He really wanted me to do it earlier, but I thought I'd rather wait until Eric and I could (show) together. We talked about it the year before he was old enough to do it and that next year we started."

Choosing hogs for showing

comes early and they are sorted out.

The most fun part for Crystal is meeting the friends she's made in 4-H.

"It's the people. There are certain people you see pretty much at all the shows, and that might be the only time you see them, too," she said. "You also feel like you're a part of the Farm Show, you're not just an onlooker."

Crystal also enjoys the respect that the show exhibitors get from the public. And when a hog wants to go through crowded aisles, she said it is fun when she sees "the pig go barging through all the people."

Philip recalled one show in which some preschoolers wanted to pet the hogs. One of the teachers told a child who reached in to pet the hog, "Don't, they bite." Immediately after, one lady came along and when a little boy reached his hand in, she told him, "Pet him, they don't bite."

For all that, the show experience is most valuable to the 4-H members.

According to their mother, Nancy Charles, "It's fun, whether we win or lose. They just enjoy the experience. They're not doing it to win."



When winning, the money from the ribbons and the sale goes into a pooled fund for Crystal, Eric, and Phillip. Then it is divided equally and placed in savings. The 4-H'ers learn a lot about picking out hogs from being members. They learn about "muscles, trim, and leanness," according to Eric, who places feed.

