

Innerst Heads National Berkshire Group

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York Co. Correspondent

RED LION (York Co.) — "Without purebreds, all you're going to have someday will be mongrels," said York County pork producer Greg Innerst.

Innerst, an outspoken advocate of retaining the value of purebred animal genetics, is the newest president of the American Berkshire Association (ABA). He was elected head of the ABA at the July annual meeting in Beatrice, Neb., held in conjunction with the breed's national summer type conference show and sale.

The Innerst family, which includes Greg, his wife Beth, and their daughters Lane and Jesse, maintain a 20-sow Berkshire breeding operation on their Deer Road farm. He is employed in the retail meat business and also serves as president of the York

County Pork Producers.

One of nine national directors, Innerst was elevated to the head post by his peers after serving just a year on the board. But even before his election to the breed presidency, he was tireless in promoting the value of the black and white hog that has become gold in some meat cases around the world.

"It was the Japanese who told us what we had," said Innerst, of the island nation where Berkshires are highly regarded for both their meat quality and genetics. "They've been a favorite there for years. Japanese began exporting from here about 1970."

As the U.S. pork industry focused on consumer trends toward low and no fat, Berkshire popularity in the U.S. faltered. The breed has wrestled over the years with a reputation as a meat

that tends toward fattiness. But while Berkshire hogs were domestically out of the pork industry favor, oriental gourmet cooks tuned their tastebuds to the breed's meat of higher Ph level, brighter red color, and tenderness.

"Consumers want a quality product that tastes good," said Innerst, who makes it a point to sample pork dishes when he dines out. "But they've been told it must be lean, lean — that can make pork tough. Berks have just a little fat marbled through the meat, what it needs to give it tenderness and flavor."

The American Berkshire Association, organized in 1875 and the oldest official swine registry in the world, has taken another lead in the industry with its Berkshire Gold program. Berkshire Gold is a standard of meat measurement and quality.

To qualify to be graded and sold as Berkshire Gold, animals must be at least 50 percent purebred

Berkshire, backed up with a "paper trail" of pedigrees and breeding.

But just having the right pedigrees does not automatically put a Berkshire or Berk-crossed hog in the Gold program. The carcass must also meet the program's rigid quality criteria.

Only a few packers in the Midwest are certified to participate in the Berkshire Gold export program. Eastern producers of Berkshires who meet the Gold standards and quality for the carcass premium payments of \$3 to \$10 per hundredweight must now network. To take advantage of the

niche market, some pool their animals at a collection point and ship them up to several hundred miles west.

One of Greg Innerst's goals as national Berkshire president is to change that. He aims, within a year or two, to have helped establish an East Coast packing and sales program for Berkshire Gold certified meat readily accessible to consumers.

Success of that program, however, may hinge on supply. And because of Berkshires declining numbers over the past few

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Beth and Greg Innerst, right, accepted a plaque for their national champion boar at the Berkshire summer type conference. Making the presentation was Berkshire Association Vice President Randy Tuthill.

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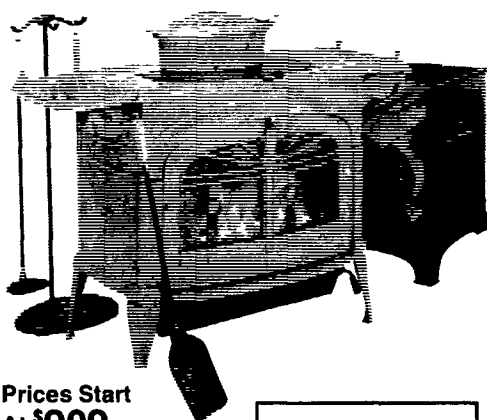
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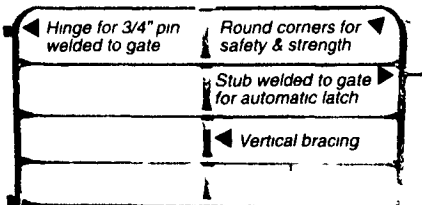


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