

Environment, Technology Awareness Spell 20 Years Of Success For Pa. Pork President, An Independent Producer

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know that are always looking for a job, they're always looking for this, they're always looking for something different, they don't like this, they don't like that? But farming is always something different. If you don't like what you're doing today, probably tomorrow is going to change."

Reinecker takes a certain pride in bucking the trends, in being different. He calls himself the "last of a dying breed" — he's an independent in an industry that is becoming almost completely vertically integrated, where producers are under contracts with feed mills, where costs are established, and where margins are small.

Each year the PPPC president markets 1,500 head of hogs mostly to Hatfield Quality Meats and to about six other regular customers, mostly small packers in the area. But Reinecker ships hogs to many towns in the region and to people who want any kind of hog. He's marketed hogs to Hanover, Carlisle, York, and auctions in Lancaster County.

Reinecker has marketed hogs to people as far away as Leesburg, Va. Those who buy spent some time as field laborers in Adams County on the many orchards. "Now they have a residential roofing business in Leesburg," he said. "They have their own company and they still come back here for my pigs." Some drive two hours or more late in the week to pick out the animal they want for the holidays.

Reinecker enjoys working with people, but what drew him into farming was the independence it provided.

"I enjoy being out, I enjoy the seasons," he said. "The variability, the change. I enjoy the growing cycles. I enjoy nature. I'm an animal person. I am a people person."

Reinecker has worked on both farms in the family. One is his father's beef farm, which includes about 160 acres of tillable land.

His father Ray finishes about 100 head of beef heifers per year. They are brought in at 400-450 pounds and taken to 1,100 pounds and sold at Lancaster County auctions.

Both farms include about 200 acres of corn, 150 acres in soybeans, 50 acres in barley, and 10 acres in hay. The feed is used for the hogs and the beef.

Reinecker makes use of a continuous-flow finishing system. He's able to do so successfully without risk of disease to the herd because he uses familiar feeder suppliers: his uncle Stan Reinecker, who uses 20 sows in York Springs, and cousin Earl Stock, who uses 80 sows in New Oxford.

Reinecker is familiar with the sow units and brings pigs in at eight weeks old weighing 45-55 pounds each.

"I sell every week, so I market them as they're ready," he said. "My building is a continuous-flow, which is contrary to the all-in/all-out technology that has been used throughout the industry."

The 100 sows produce a steady supply of feeder pigs for Reinecker to finish. Both sources vaccinate against the same swine diseases. Working closely with his sources, he can comingle the pigs in the unit. That enables Dave to work toward the niche markets that he has made.

Reinecker uses predominately purebred boars at the sow units. They use either York, Hampshire, or Duroc boars that are mated to a crossbred white sow base, mostly York/Hampshire crosses to get the blue butt, F1 pigs. Stock uses AI on about 20-30 percent of the sows and makes use of some commercial genetic stock for gilt replacement.

Reinecker gets a complement of gilts and barrows to market to his customers.

Though the PPPC president does fieldwork when necessary, if given a choice, he said he would rather work with the animals.

"I've always considered myself a nurturer of animals," he said. "It's a talent to be able to be able to look at an animal and realize what that animal is in need of."

Dave's father, Ray, purchased the home farm in 1962 when Dave was seven years old. Dave said he doesn't really remember too much of not living on the farm. His father worked as a welder for the engineering division of Bethlehem Steel. Ray had the opportunity to purchase the farm and change occupations — which he did.

"I've always had an attitude that I was bright enough to be able to do my own management," said Reinecker. "If you're not an independent, if you're on contract with somebody else, you are going to be depending on them for some portion of expertise in the swine operation. And for that you give up both our independence as well as

some profit."

The conflict that Reinecker feels is evident: why pay somebody else for their knowledge when you can learn that yourself?

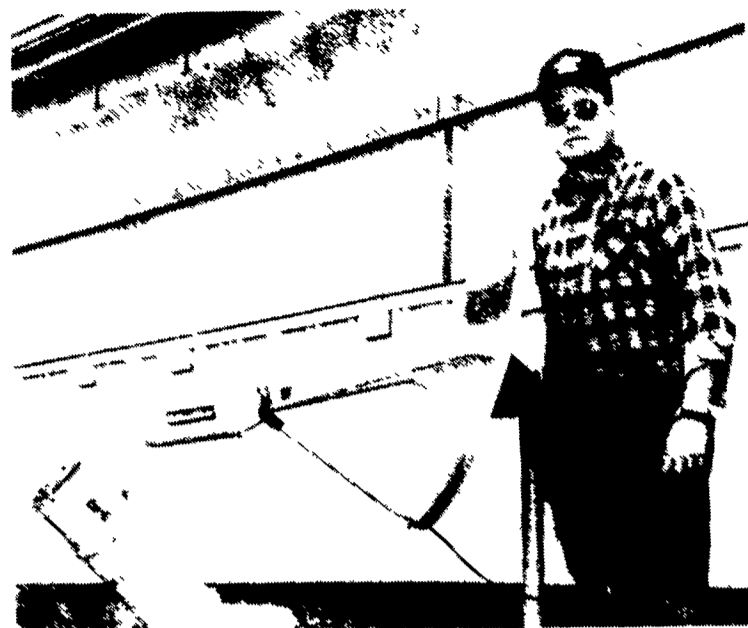
"Whether it's to line up marketing, whether it's to formulate feed, whether it's to purchase inputs," he said, the independent can do equally well himself. "Take any of the contractors — whatever they do, I had to do myself. And I enjoy that challenge. Why should I pay someone else to do it for me?"

Reinecker questions the accepted belief that someone else can worry about the marketing and the price of feed. "If I had to depend on someone else to manage my business, why am I in the business? There's \$5 an hour work and there's \$15 an hour work — and somebody else is doing the \$15 an hour work while the farmer is doing \$5 an hour work."

However, Reinecker insists there is a place for contracting.

"I'm certainly not downing contracting. The way the economics of the industry are now, I don't know that I could have gotten started now, 20 years later than I did. The profit in hogs has always been thought of as being a mortgage-lifter. They have been for me as well. They still are, but it just takes a whole lot more capital to get into it. And I think that's really where contracting fits well into today's industry, into that beginning operation."

For independent producers, trying to get the best price at the worst of times is especially challenging. Reinecker remembers the turmoil in the swine industry three years ago, when the bottom dropped out



Dave Reinecker, new Pennsylvania Pork Producers Council (PPPC) president, talked about the importance of adapting new technology, keeping an open mind, and thinking about the future of an industry under fire. Here he looks over a DTN satellite receiver dish.

of the hog market and hogs were going from 25 cents to 35 cents a pound. At the time, Reinecker was receiving only about \$23.75 a

pound in the fall that year. He was losing money. For the hogs sold, "I should have just stapled a \$30 bill

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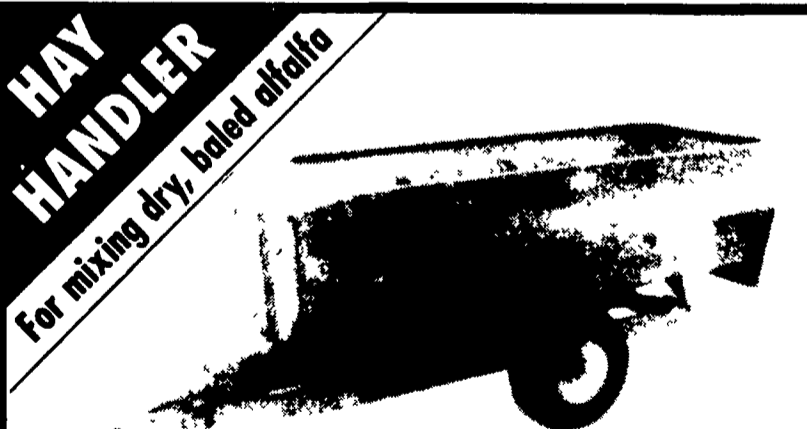
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