

Swine Producers

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setup and the open floor plan. "It certainly lends itself to (the hogs) being more comfortable, with freedom to eat when they want and wander around," she said.

As hogs near finish weight, sorting them for shipping can be done with a relatively small amount of hassle, compared to the old way of "physically pushing them around," Crone said.

At sorting time, the pigs must pass through an electronic scale in order to reach the feeding station. A computer-controlled gate separates the animals by weight.

Hogs from one side of a barn (about 550 animals) can be sorted in two 12-hour periods, according to Crone.

A scale for sorting is located

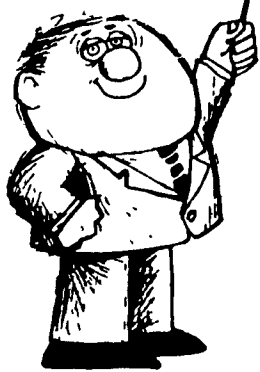
in the center of each half of the barns, with are divided lengthwise. The hogs have more mobility in the Croner's barns than in many conventional modern facilities. The extra activity raises the question of whether daily weight gains could be reduced by the setup.

But Crone believes that labor savings and being able to target the optimum finish weight (247-257 pounds) offsets any sacrifice in weight gains.

"We figure whatever we lose in weight gain, we gain it back by shipping during the premium window," she said.

Crone also likes easy access to the animals.

The open floor plan "allows us to really get in there and be involved with the pigs," she said.



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The feeding station is located in the center of the pen, along with the sorting scale and gates. At the far end of the barn, you can see how manure is deposited mostly in the middle, away from the edges of the building where the animals sleep. The manure pit under the slatted floor is divided, so the outside sections fill much more slowly with fresh manure. Manure will be pumped from the central area to the digester, and eventually returned for storage in the pits along the edge. These hogs are almost finished, and many from the original group have already been shipped to the packer.

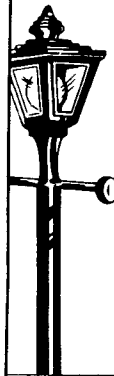
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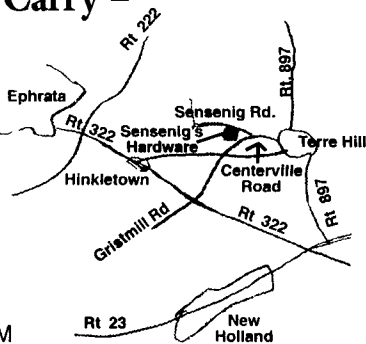
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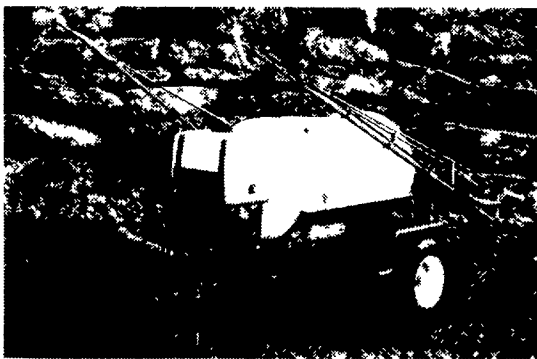
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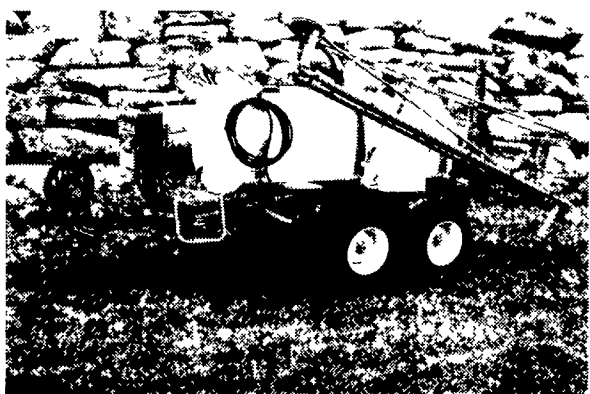
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