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## “Low Labor” Portable Farrowing Building

Pigs farrowed in deep bedding earn healthy premiums over those produced in farrowing crates, says Jim Hinrikus, Prosser, Neb., but who wants to clean out the pens?

Hinrikus found a profitable way to eliminate the hard labor associated with bedded pens without losing any of the benefits. “We would never go back to crates,” he says.

What he did was to design 8-stall portable farrowing houses that he can pick up and move after the pigs are weaned and moved out. Then it’s a simple matter of using a tractor to scrape down the cement pad the houses sit on and power washing the farrowing house.

“They’re built on frames made from used center pivot irrigation pipe,” he explains. “We pick up one end with a tractor and loader, back a trailer underneath and pull it out of the way.”

Once each house is freshly bedded and back in place, the next set of sows is welcomed to their maternity ward. Pigs are happier, reports Hinrikus, and so is he.

“It takes my dad and I about one third the

time to clean these sheds as it did to power wash crates. With the straw, you don’t get the odors. The pigs are easier to work, and you don’t stink after being around them,” he notes.

Hinrikus has built three modular farrowing houses with his father. Each building contains eight 4 by 8-ft. stalls with front and back entrances. Each building is 5 ft. high at the front entrance and 3 1/2 ft. high at the rear. The combination of reduced head space and insulation sprayed on walls and ceilings keeps the pens warm in Nebraska winters. Asquirrel cage fan and ductwork attached to each pen, combined with the ability to open front and rear entrances for air movement, keeps pigs cool in the summer. Each house is wired for heat lamps at farrowing.

Mud flaps on front serve as barriers against the wind while allowing the pigs easy entrance and exit, while the back door allows Hinrikus access to the baby pigs and makes adding straw simple. Each pen opens to a 4 by 12-ft. outside pen, also positioned over the concrete pad. This area serves as an exercise space and is used for twice-a-day

floor feeding. The waterer is out there, too. Pigs can be easily locked inside when the outside pad needs to be scraped clean.

After two to three weeks in the farrowing house, sows and their approximately 50 piglets are grouped in a larger pen for three to four weeks before the pigs are weaned. At 2 1/2 months, the pigs are split into groups of 25 according to size and moved back onto cement and into 8 by 32-ft. sheds. They are deep bedded with bean straw until marketed at 250 lbs. These sheds and outside pens are also designed for low labor, allowing a tractor access for quick cleaning as needed.

Deep bedding throughout their lives, plenty of room for exercise, and a medication-free feeding program qualifies his pigs for marketing through Nimann Ranch. The specialty meat seller offers a base floor of \$40/cwt. with a minimum premium above the cash market when it rises above the base. In addition, Hinrikus receives added premiums because of his year-round farrowing. Most suppliers to Nimann Ranch farrow in spring and fall, but he farrows his 100 sows year ‘round, keeping around 700 pigs in finishing



Loader tractor picks up one end of frame, then backs a trailer underneath and pulls it out of the way.

houses at any one time.

“We have to meet the protocols on animal husbandry,” says Hinrikus. “We can vaccinate, but if we use antibiotics we can’t sell through Nimann. “We have better herd health than ever, and when we do have to treat, the antibiotics work.”

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## Old Haybine Powers Big Zero-Turn Mower

When he spotted an old Renn haybine for sale a while back, Arvin DeCook, Sully, Iowa, knew exactly what he could do with it.

“I’d been thinking about making a big zero-turn mower by mounting a pto-powered Woods mower on an old self-propelled combine,” he says.

“I decided the haybine would work even better than a combine since it had individual hydrostatic drive and steering on the front wheels and the rear wheel was just a dolly wheel,” he says. “It had a slant-six Chrysler engine that was in good condition.”

His first step was to narrow the haybine power unit, so the wheels would track behind the 90-in. mower. “I had to cut 14 in. out of the middle of the machine. At the same time, I simplified the drive belt system that had powered the individual hydraulic motors on the drive wheels,” he says.

“There were two belts from the engine to the hydrostat drive shaft, and the belts ran through right angle pulleys to pulleys on the shaft. It was a real menagerie of belts and pulleys. After I’d narrowed the power unit, the shafts from the hydrostats were too long, so I had to shorten them. While I was at it, I mounted a gearbox under it that lined up with the drive pulley from the engine. It’s a right angle gearbox, but with shafts out both sides.

I connected these to the hydrostat drive shafts with Lovejoy connections. So now there’s just one short straight belt from the engine.”

DeCook says mounting the mower on the rebuilt haybine was simple. He built a bracket on back of the mower, so he could mount it where the header had fit on the machine. He lengthened the upper header mount arms on the haybine by 14 in. to get more lift and let it hang further forward so he could see it from the operator’s seat a little better.

“The header lift cylinders allow me to raise and lower it and also tilt it if I want to,” he says. “I can raise it up all the way and then tilt the front edge up about 60 degrees, so I can service the underside of the deck or sharpen the blades without crawling under it or taking it off and turning it over.”

The final step was getting power to the mower. A shaft at the center of the haybine powered the header, so DeCook had only to run a pto shaft from that to the mower. He had to turn the gearbox on the mower 180 degrees to face the rear.

DeCook left the 3-point hitch in place so he can still use the mower behind a tractor.

DeCook says the conversion took him a couple of weeks or so working on it off and on, with most of the time spent on narrowing the haybine and rebuilding the drive system.



Arvin DeCook made this big zero-turn mower by mounting a pto-powered Woods mower on an old haybine.

“This was a lot easier than mounting the mower on an old combine. It’s easier to operate and more maneuverable, too,” he says.

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