Don Ruzicka says his 3 mobile, covered hog shelters help him efficiently raise hogs on pasture.

On hot days, built-in water lines provide hogs with a cooling shower.

Efficient System Helps Raise Lots Of Hogs On Pasture

"Animal welfare is everything. If you treat an animal right, they gain better, and the meat will taste better. It's a no brainer," says Don Ruzicka, Killam, Alberta, who figured out nifty ways to pasture pigs under roof.

His pigs get fresh pasture twice a day, shade, and a shower when it is hot, and plenty of feed and water on demand. His mobile hog shelters slide through the grass with ease and make U-turns just as smoothly. Everything is geared to having happy hogs.

Pasture hogs have been a moneymaker for Ruzicka and his wife, Marie. They have grossed as much as $49,700 pasturing hogs and poultry on 9.35 acres, a small part of their 640-acre, all-pastured livestock operation. Key to that return are his mobile shelters. He built 3 for hogs that each take 20 hogs to market, buying at a discount and selling at a premium.

"My pigs come from a purebred breeder who cull any gilts with too much back fat," says Ruzicka. "Good back fat is just what I want. I raise them on pasture with supplemental feed and sell the pork to customers who come to the farm."

Frameworks for the shelters are mostly 1-in. steel tubing, except for the runner members, which are 1 1/2-in. tubing.

"I welded up the frame for each 34-in. high side of the 16 by 32-ft. shelters, laid them on the ground, and then tack-welded 34-in. high by 16-ft. long hog panels to them," says Ruzicka. "I stiffened the structure by running a 32-ft. length of steel tubing from front to back at ground level."

A second length of tubing connects the tops of the side panels at their midpoints. It further strengthens the structure, but also serves two other functions. One is to provide support for the roof panels that cover the back half of the pen. A 4-ft. length of steel tubing welds to it and the front to back stiffener tube. A second upright welds to the middle of the rear panel. A steel tube running from the top of one upright to the other serves as a ridge beam.

The midpoint stiffener also carries a length of 3/4-in. water line halfway across it. Turn a valve and water flows out the end of the line.

"When it gets hot, I turn on the water line, and the pigs wallow under it until cool," says Ruzicka. "Then they get up and go eat. Without the cooling shower, they just sleep all day."

A second water line runs to the front center of each mobile pen. It feeds a nipple waterer. All the waterlines connect to a 450-gal. tank mounted on a salvaged sprayer carriage with dual wheels.

"The tank provides enough water for 60 hogs for 3 to 4 days, depending on the heat," says Ruzicka. "The tank sits up high enough to provide gravity feed to the nipple waterers and the showers."

To make the pens mobile, Ruzicka mounts each front corner on skis salvaged from the family's old snowmobiles. While each could easily be pulled by itself, Ruzicka found a way to pull them in unison. He hooked them to the toolbar of an old rod weeder after stripping it down.

Initially Ruzicka had the shelters side by side, but the first time he tried turning, it didn't work. Adding 2 ft. between was just enough space.

"I keep an old tractor hooked up to the toolbar and pull the water trailer with an old pickup," says Ruzicka. "When the water tank runs low, I just pull it back to the buildings and refill it."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Don Ruzicka, Box 579, Killam, Alta. Canada T0B 2L0 (780 385-2474; www.sunrisefarm.ca).

Mobile Pen Puts Pigs To Work

Dru Peters and Homer Walden use "pig power" harnessed in mobile pens to till and fertilize their cut-flower beds. At their Sunnyside Farm they raise a lot of flowers, using hoop houses and 25 100-ft. long, 5-ft. wide beds. Each year they also raise 4 pigs to 250 lbs. in a 5 by 10-ft. moveable pen.

"We fallow about a fourth of the beds each year, planting them to a buckwheat cover crop," says Peters. "When I'm ready to plant a bed of flowers, I bring in the pigs."

Peters keeps the pigs in a 5 by 10-ft. pen with pressure-treated 2 by 6 boards on the 4 sides at ground level. Hog panels attached to the inside of the boards are bent to form sidewalls and roof. Panels are wired together at the top and the sides are covered in custom canvas he buys from Neilly Canvas Goods (http://neillycanvas.com/)."

Peters and Walden discovered the canvas company when they noticed the name on an 18-wheeler. "We figured if they could stand up to road speeds, wind and weather, they would work for us," says Peters. "They do custom tarps and put the grommets in so we can fasten them down easily. We tried all types of tarps previously, and they ripped to shreds in no time. These last."

The key to using the hogs for tillage is the ease with which Peters can move the pens by hand. The wheels are mounted to T fittings that are connected in turn to T fittings on a pipe axle that runs through the 2 longer 2 by 6's. The axle is placed about 2/3 the distance from the front of the pen.

Pipes approximately 6 ft. in length also attach to the axle. T's bend at a 90-degree angle to a vertical position, rising up and over the front of the pen.

To move the pen, Peters pulls on ropes attached to T's on the upper ends of the pipes. As the pipes angle forward, they leverage the pen up on its wheels, and she can pull it ahead to untilled ground.

"Even when they are very small, they will dig up every inch in 24 hrs.," says Peters. "As they grow, I often move them more than once a day."

When not using the pig tillers on flower beds or vegetable garden beds, Peters moves the pen alongside fence lines, where they make quick work of weeds and grasses.

Peters buys her pigs midsummer, pasturing them through the fall and winter and then sells them at farmers markets in the spring. When they get big enough so their backs rub the roof, she moves them into electric fence pens. She feeds no grain, but supplements pasture with excess vegetables, fruit and broken eggs.

The eggs come from laying hens in 15 mobile pens housing up to 25 layer hens per pen. These pens use the same wheel system and are also 5 by 10 ft., but in an A-frame style. They are framed with pressure treated 2 by 4's with 2 by 6 runners to either side. The frames are covered in hardware cloth with 1 by 2-in. openings.

Like the hog pen, the layer pens are covered with the same canvas tarps. Roosts are mounted under the tarps, and a nesting box at the rear can be pulled out like a drawer for egg collection. The bottom, sides and ends are left open for ventilation and sunlight.

"I usually keep hens for about 3 years, and from the time I get them, they are in the pens 24/7," says Peters. "We also pasture some cattle and try to move the layer pens in a group behind the cattle."

Peters has found that her pens, combined with stringing an electric fence wire at 6 to 8 in. off the ground, keeps predators away from her birds.

"We have skunks, raccoons, fisher, possum and dogs, and they all love chicken," says Peters. "I use the hottest electric galvanized wire and a 50-mile fencer, and it keeps them all away."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Sunnyside Farm, 1865 York Rd., Dover, Penn. 17315 (ph 410 336-9735; www.sunnysidefarmpa.com).

Sunnyside Farm raises 4 pigs in 5 by 10-ft. moveable pens to till and fertilize their cut-flower beds. "When we're ready to plant a bed to flowers, we bring in the pigs," says Dru Peters.

Photo at left shows what 4 pastured hogs can till in one day. Pen sides are made with pressure-treated 2 by 6 boards at the bottom. Photo above shows lever system that raises pens up on wheels.