

"IT'S REDUCED OUR PRE-WEANING MORTALITY 20%"

Circular Farrowing Crate Saves Both Space And Baby Pigs

A home-built circular farrowing crate reduces crushing of baby pigs and keeps both pigs and sows healthier, says Frank Hilbing, Welland, Ontario, who has built eight circular crates for his hog barn.

"Sows can't slide down the curved sides of these crates the way they do in rectangular crates, so they tend to lie down more slowly and carefully," notes Hilbing. "Pigs have plenty of room to get out of the way and a warm cozy creep area for sleeping. Since installing the round crates we've reduced preweaning mortality by 20%, some of which is due to the slatted floor which helps keep both sows and piglets cleaner. We have less trouble with diarrhea and infections than we do in our rectangular crates with solid floors. In fact, we've even moved sickly babies from our rectangular crates into the round crates. They improve and start growing right away in the cleaner environment, gaining 10 to 15% faster."

In addition to improved health, round crates require less space. "We had been using only conventional rectangular farrowing crates but they didn't fit well in our barn. The round farrowing crates take up less room, allowing us to put more sows in the same amount of space."

The round crates are 5 1/2 ft. in dia. and 40 in. high. Each crate is equipped with a pull-out wood gate, a steel folding feed trough and a water nipple.

Crates are laid out side by side, with each pair covering a 6 1/2 by 14-ft. slatted floor that overlays an 18-in. deep pit. The paired-up crates are divided by a diagonal plywood board. Floor slats between the crates are

covered with plywood to serve as the creep area. A corner of this solid floor extends into the crate.

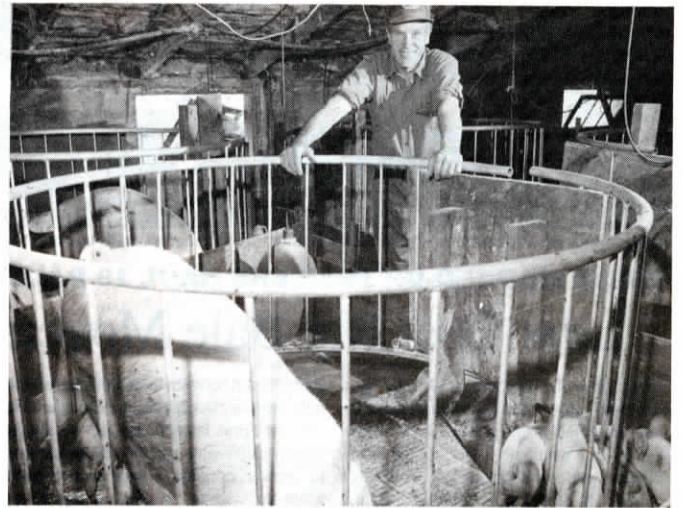
The farrowing section of Hilbing's hog barn is 30 ft. long and 30 ft. wide with a 3-ft. wide alley down the middle, leaving 13 1/2 ft. on each side of the alley. On one side of the alley are six conventional rectangular farrowing crates, each 5 ft. wide and 13 ft. long, over a solid floor with gutter. On the other side of the alley, in the same space, Hilbing installed eight round farrowing crates.

There's one manure pit for every two crates, and it's normally emptied once every two months. Round farrowing crates can only be used with a liquid manure system and slatted floors or manure removal would be too difficult, says Hilbing, who attaches a metal shield to the crate's vertical rods to keep manure out of the creep area.

Crates are built out of two 5 1/2-ft. dia. circles of 1-in. hollow steel tubing joined by 30-in. high, 1/2-in. dia. vertical steel rods, spaced 6-in. apart. A support frame holds the crate sides 10 in. above the slatted floor, for an overall pen height of 40 in. "The 10-in. space at the bottom of each circle gives the pigs plenty of room to move in and out of the farrowing crate and to escape on any side when the sow lays down," says Hilbing.

Hilbing estimates he used about \$100 worth of steel to build each crate.

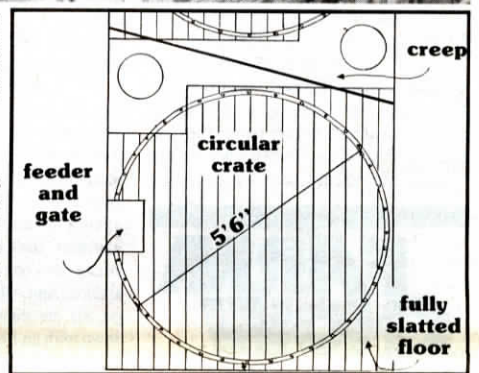
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Hilbing (above) says he can put 8 round crates in the same space that would accommodate just 6 conventional rectangular crates.

Drawing at right shows that there's a solid creep floor between each pair of circular crates as well as angled plywood wall that keeps the pigs in their own crates.

Photo and drawing courtesy Hog Marketplace quarterly.



"GREAT WAY TO ADD EXTRA EAR CORN TO SILAGE"

Combo Forage Head Chops One Row, Picks Another

Chopping one row of corn and picking the ears off the row next to it is a great way to add extra ear corn to silage, according to an Ohio farmer who built his own "combo" harvester.

"I've long noticed that the most profitable dairymen feed high moisture ear corn to cows but, in most cases, smaller dairy operators cannot justify the investment required for extra harvesting and storage equipment. I decided to find an inexpensive and simple way to incorporate ear corn into my operation with home-built equipment," says David C. McCoy, Fredericktown, Ohio.

When he started looking into building a pick-chop combo forage harvester, a neighbor told him he was too late because Case had first built such a machine 40 years before. "I looked into it and sure enough they had. But Case's machine picked the ear and sent it to one wagon and then chopped the fodder and blew it into another wagon. I also found that Gehl had built the kind of head I was looking for. They called it a PC head - pick and chop. But Gehl's head fit the old fan-type harvesters which didn't split or crack enough kernels. I've learned that other companies have experimented with the idea over the years but none have built a head for modern, 'screenable' harvesters.

"I bought a used Deere 38. I stripped the 2-row head down so that only the right side row would be used for chopping whole plant silage. I then bought a 2-row New Holland snapper unit and modified the left

half to fit on the Deere head. I then modified the harvester itself like the manufacturer suggests for snapped ear corn use (lengthening the tongue and pto so I could turn without hitting the snout, raising up the machine so I could get the head all the way down for full screen area). The Deere harvester has a 1,000 pto, which helps my 80 hp tractor handle the load. I use 1 1/2-in. screen."

McCoy says the biggest advantage of the chop-pick system is that it lets him feed more corn to cows using his existing forage wagons, blower, unloader, auger feeder and 16 by 55 stave silo. The head cost just \$300 to build.

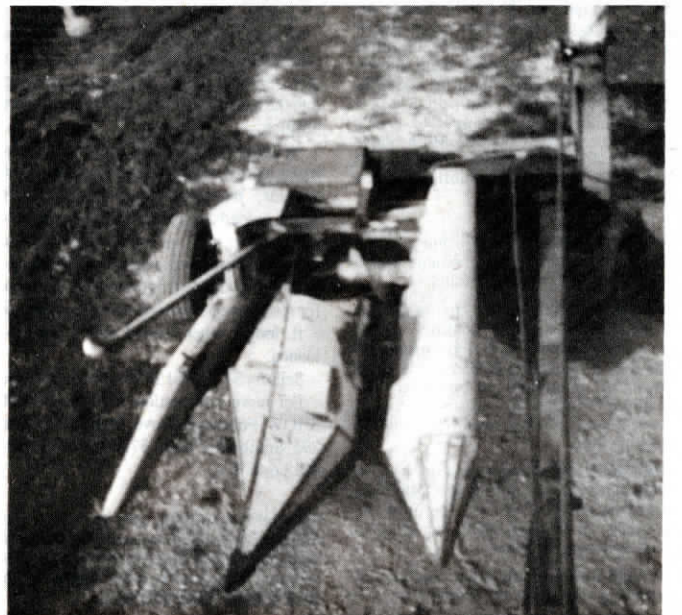
Another advantage of leaving every other row in the field is that McCoy, who has practiced conservation tillage for 10 years, is able to till the extra stalk residue back into the field. "I have always sown a cover crop of rye, wheat or oats after I remove corn silage. This works great but my farm is rather wet and this 'green manure' complicates spring tillage. Now I chop stalks left in the field with a stalk chopper and then lightly till the residue into the soil."

McCoy also likes the fact that the combo head lets him harvest corn earlier in the season when there's less weather risk. "I always found it difficult to get corn to dry down enough in the late fall to store without waste in round cribs."

One disadvantage of the combo head is that it ensiles "ear corn" a little wetter than

the ideal moisture, which you could achieve if you harvested it by itself. Also, because forage and corn are mixed in the field you can't vary the ratio of corn to forage the way you could if they were harvested separately.

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