

"Hogs are nice to work with"

Hendrick: automation key to pig farm

Chuck Hendrick has liked pigs since he was a kid. "At age 21, he is in the hog business full-time.

He farms with his father, Earl, on their Pringle Road farm in Evergreen township. Earl Hendrick has a full-time job at Hills and Dales General Hospital and shares the field work with his son, who normally does all the work with the pigs.

If it weren't for automation, the two couldn't handle the operation alone. "How do you automate a pig? You don't, but about everything else about the hog operation is automated. The setup has been functioning about a year.

Pigs are fed automatically. Corn and soybean supplement is mixed and ground with a push of the button. Manure flows down the slanted floors to a trough and from there, once a week is pumped into the slurry tank. The labor saving devices allow Chuck to do all the normal chores involving the hogs in about a half hour. "If you had to do all that work by hand, you'd be in there half a day."

The Hendricks farm more than 500 acres, with 260 of them owned by Earl Hendrick. His son rents the rest. Crops grown are corn, navy beans, wheat, hay and some-

times oats. Other than the land, ownership between the two is split 50-50.

Mrs. Earl (Doris) Hendrick keeps the books and helps in the pig barn when her husband and son are busy in the fields. Chuck, unmarried, lives at home.

AFTER CHUCK GRADUATED from Cass City High School in 1977, the Hendrick family (he has two older brothers) faced the familiar dilemma for farm families. If he was to stay on the farm, the operation had to be expanded to provide added income.

Hogs were chosen as the medium of expansion.

One reason was that there always have been hogs on the farm. Prior to construction, the Hendricks were keeping about 100 feeder pigs in the barn on the farm next to theirs, on which they hold a life lease.

Secondly, Chuck explained, "I've always liked them. Hogs are nice to work with. They can be disagreeable at times, but you just have to be patient."

A third reason was that hogs would provide the family with a steady income year-round. There is also more money to be made by raising corn to feed to hogs than to sell corn as a cash crop.

IN ADDITION TO THE new equipment, Chuck had to learn a new part of the operation, farrowing, that is, breeding. Previously, he and his father had always bought feeders, which they fattened to market weight (205-230 pounds).

At present, he keeps 45 sows and two boars in the barn at the adjoining farm. One to two weeks before the sows are due to farrow, they are brought to the farrowing house in the new building, capable of holding 12 sows and 140-150 little pigs. The little pigs are weaned away from the mothers after five weeks and go to the nursery, where they gradually are converted from hand feeding to the automatic feeders.

After a month there, the pigs are moved to the finishing building section, where 12 pens hold 20-25 pigs per pen, for a maximum of 300. Hendrick usually sells one pen per week. THE FINISHING SECTION is the only part which is unheated. It contains 6 inches of insulation in the ceiling and 3 1/2 inches in the walls and on a day when the outside temperature was 10-15 degrees, inside it was probably 50-55 degrees.

There are vents on one side of the building and fans

on the other, and even on the hottest days of summer, the constant ventilation and insulation keep temperatures at 70-75 degrees inside. The air pulled through the building also pulls out most flies.

The floors in the hog building are slanted toward troughs that run along the walls. Manure runs down the floor into the troughs and once a week is pumped into pits. Once a week, the contents of the pits are pumped into the slurry storage tank, which can hold six months' supply. From there, it is emptied into a manure spreader and spread onto fields, which only has to be done twice a year. The pens do not need cleaning.

THE SILO HOLDS 10,000 bushels of shelled corn, a year's supply. A bin holds 12 tons of commercially made soybean meal.

A push of a couple buttons each day grinds enough mixture of the corn and soybean meal to fill two bins which hold a 24-hour supply. The feeders turn on automatically every two hours and dump a supply of feed onto the floor of each pen. Controls mounted over each pen allow the amount to be adjusted, depending on the size of the pigs in the pen.

Water is supplied to the hogs automatically, which get it from nipple spouts.

At present, Hendrick is still buying some feeders. He is gradually increasing the number of sows to 80, from the present 57, which will provide enough feeders for his own needs and allow him to sell some.

THE YOUTHFUL FARMER didn't care to disclose how much money he and his father have invested in their new facility.

Back last fall, when fattened hogs were selling for \$34-35 per hundredweight, he figured the break-even point was \$33, only enough to allow them to make all their payments.

When he had been to market a few weeks ago, hogs were selling in the high \$30 range, which was "enough to get by at that price."

Hendrick's operation isn't big enough that he can cut back on the number of hogs being fed when market

prices dip.

That is what the bigger operators are doing now, reducing the size of breeding herds and selling record numbers of hogs in a reaction to low prices. Unlike cash crops, livestock can't be held back until prices improve.

ACCORDING TO THE Michigan Agricultural Reporting Service, the 960,000 hogs and pigs on Michigan

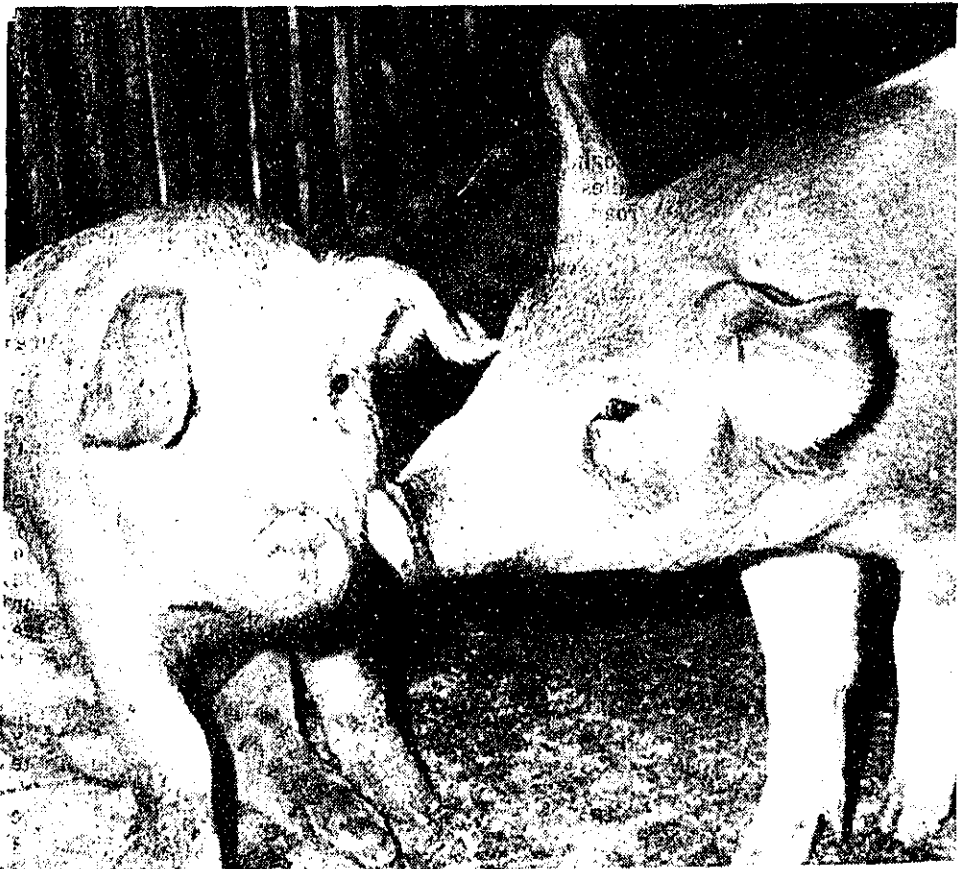
farms as of Dec. 1 was the most since World War II. The 508,000 hogs slaughtered in November resulted in the highest average daily kill on record. In January, the number slaughtered was still higher than expected.

It takes a sow normally 112 days to farrow and pigs 5-5 1/2 months to reach slaughter weight, thus hog farmers cannot react immediately to low prices by

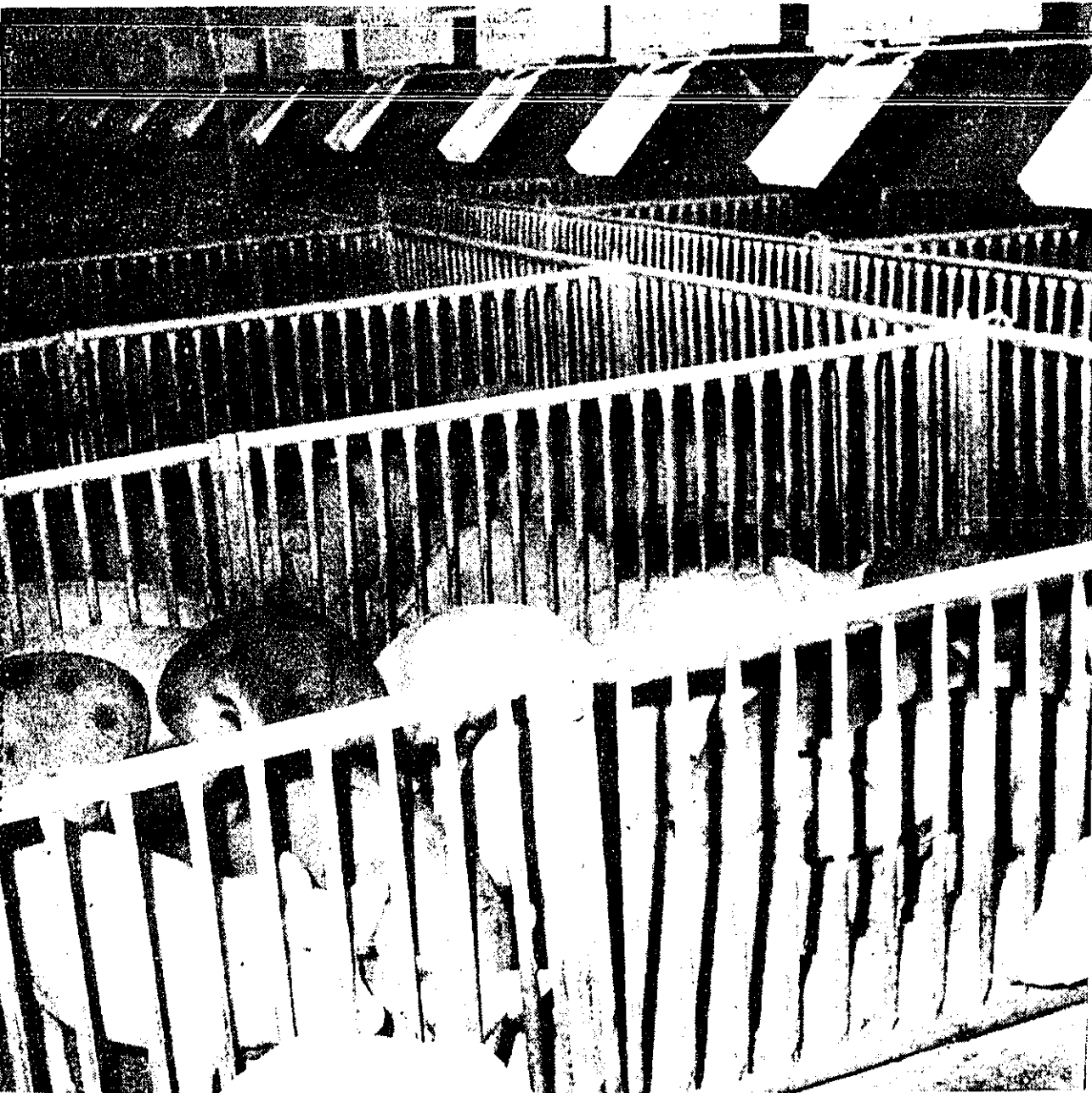
reducing the numbers they feed.

After the number of hogs going to market starts declining, it will mean the price paid to farmers will increase, and farmers like Chuck Hendrick obviously look forward to that.

Michigan State University agricultural economist John Ferris is predicting prices will be in the mid-\$40s by late spring or early summer.



"I HAVE A HEADACHE" -- Pigs aren't likely to become too amorous at any hog feeding operation, such as that of Chuck and Earl Hendrick. Boars not kept for breeding become barrows at an early age. Pigs are sold for slaughter after 5-5 1/2 months, when they reach a weight of 205-230 pounds.



FINISHING BARN contains 12 pens, 7, 8 or 10 feet wide. As the pigs get bigger, they are moved into bigger pens. Each pen holds 20-25 animals. Feed comes from the row of hanging trays, one over each pen.

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Extension group picks officers

The Cass City Extension group met Friday at the home of Frances Kloc. A dessert luncheon was served before the meeting. Election of officers was held. Leader is Mrs. Rose Wortsell; co-leader, Mrs. Henry Airood; secretary-treasurer, Mrs. Irby Simcox, and flower fund chairperson, Kathy McCarthy. Miss Kloc showed slides and gave a commentary on township, county and state government. An open quiz followed. Next meeting will be April 11 at the home of Leila Bittel.

Bridges receive funding

Funding for replacement of three bridges in the upper Thumb has been announced by State Transportation Director John P. Woodford. Federal funds pay 80 percent of the cost, state funds 10 percent and the respective county road commissions the remaining 10 percent.

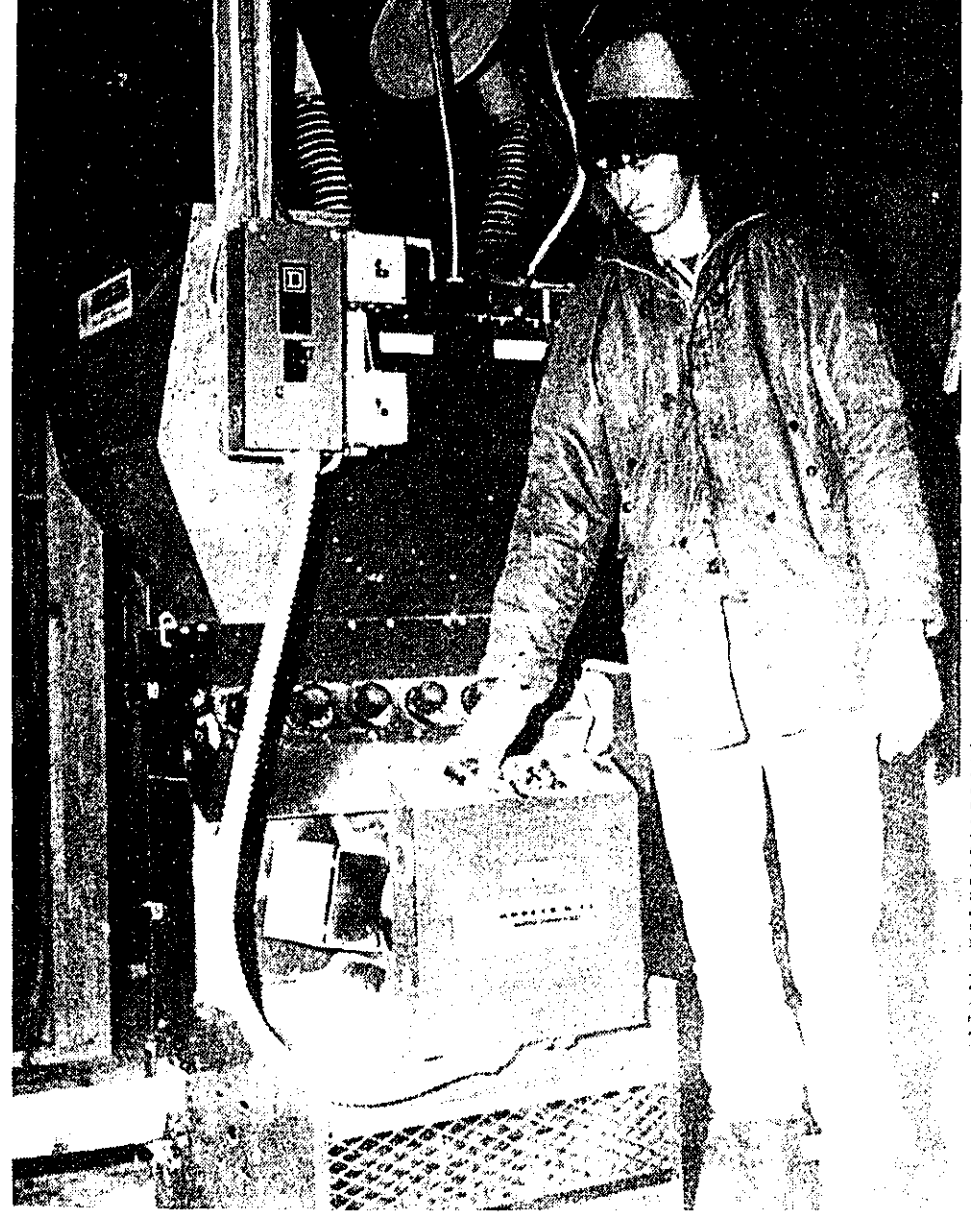
The Tuscola County Road Commission received funds for the Vassar Road bridge over Perry Creek, estimated cost of which is \$98,900, and the Ormes Road bridge over Perry Creek, \$123,000. Both bridges are near Vassar.

Construction may not take place until 1981, depending on when plans are completed and bids let.

The Sanilac County Road Commission received funding for the Walker Road bridge over the south branch of the Cass River, estimated cost \$138,000. The bridge is near Marlette.

That county's road commission had applied for funds for 12 bridges. Priority for deciding funding, according to Woodford, was based on condition of the bridge, its importance to the street or road network and the local agency's ability to finance its share of construction. Selections were made by a nine-member committee composed of representatives of the state Department of Transportation, county road commissions and municipal street agencies.

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AT THE CONTROLS of the feed grinder is Chuck Hendrick. The mixture of corn and soybean meal can be changed by moving the controls. Feeder pigs are fed 16 percent protein; sows, 13 percent.

Pavement marking bids accepted

Swanston Equipment Co. of Fargo, N.D., was lowest of five bidders for pavement marking on various Tuscola county roads. Its bid was \$109,168.

Bids were opened March 10 by the Michigan Department of Transportation in Lansing.

Clark Co. of Lake City had the lowest of three bids at \$145,605 for pavement marking on various roads in Huron county.

The Tuscola county project is to be completed by October; the Huron one by July.

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