



Farm News from February

When I think "highlights of February", number one would be the door on our workshop. I know that stories about doors may sound boring but for those of us who get to use them they can be life changers. Built back in the eighties, the workshop never did have a main door that would keep the cold out. I always hoped equipment would never break down in the winter but it usually did. Frozen fingers, frozen toes, we would just have to tough it out. The farm always found other priorities for the \$3400 that a 12 x 15 foot shop door would cost. Back in November I decided "this would be the year" and with money down, I was committed. This past month the folks from "Overhead Door" showed up, installed the door and immediately improved the quality of life on the farm. It was minus thirty eight outside this morning and toasty warm inside the shop. Does the shop door affect the animals? No more excuses not to fix the feed troughs, build new farrowing houses and insulated floors, fix the loader tractor and water truck and... and..... No trips to the sunny south this winter, I think I'll be staying in the shop.

Farm Olympics happen everyday in the pig pasture. Feeding the sows who weigh in at 200 - 300 kilograms requires a lot of skill and I'm sure many Olympic athletes would find it quite challenging. The goal is to get the pig food spread evenly in the feed troughs and quickly so that all the pigs can eat at the same time. What makes it difficult is the great number of sows that are lined up at the fence, just inches away, waiting for their morning food. After being fed every day for many years, they know every trick. They also

know that if they can get their head in the bucket then they can start eating sooner and if they can surround you and slow you down, that increases the chance of getting their heads into the bucket.

Start: Fill the buckets, one bucket of feed for 5 sows. Fill them too slow and the anxiety level increases. Next: Cross the fence into the hungry sows and plan your moves like a football player avoiding a tackle. If you move too slow they will crowd you. If you run then the whole group will start to run. Are they fast? Faster than you. Are they dangerous? Not at all, unless they step on your foot. Next: Spread the food evenly in your choice of several troughs trying to avoid the pigs that have beaten you to the trough. Grab the other pails and repeat the activity until all the food is evenly spread.

Finish. The pails are put away and all sows are happily munching. With the chore parts done then the Olympics are over, for another day.

I think I've discovered why Willy died. Willy was a healthy young boar with an exciting future but he had one major problem, he was too inexperienced to develop any relationships with the sows. It took a couple of months for me to realize that he wasn't up for his job which I knew would cause pork supply problems in the future. Then one day I noticed he figured out his role. A couple days later he was dead. It took me three months, three weeks and three days to figure it out what happened to Willy (that time being the gestation period for sows). I think he died of a heart attack. Willy is mourned by about 20 sows who have just given birth. Jerry