

Pork Journal

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Volume 31, Number 1

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focused grower

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A surge in the prevalence and level of mycotoxin contamination in weather damaged harvest wheat and barley may be hazardous to animal health and performance.

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4 NSW Government E10 ethanol mandate could use up to 27% of NSW wheat crop

A briefing to the NSW Government in December 2008 on biofuels, reported that though NSW has the capacity to satisfy demands for mandated ethanol content of 5% and 10% of unleaded fuel content, up to 27% of the NSW average production of wheat crop would be needed if all ethanol requirements were created from feed and cereal grains. Peter Bedwell reports on what this means for the pig industry.

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In an interview with ABC Rural's Arlie Douglas in February 2009, APL Director and partner in the CHM Alliance Ken Cameron, confirmed the CHM offer to take over, for an undisclosed amount, the Swickers Kingaroy bacon factory in the South Burnett and the fresh pork sales company, Hans Fresh.

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20 Young geneticists inspired by UNE Summer Course

Research scientists and postgraduate students from around Australia, and visitors from Malaysia, France, Finland and Brazil, took part in an advanced genetics course at the University of New England this summer.

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Leading Australian agribusiness, ABB Grain Ltd, has announced plans to buy New Zealand's largest and most-established brand in compound feed, NRM.

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As the economy and our businesses struggle and the world faces unprecedented challenges, the Alltech Annual Symposium will focus on finding answers to some of the major issues facing the animal feed industry such as rising feed costs, managing in a time of crisis and sustaining and growing business.

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Top: Upgraded grow-out sheds with automated ventilation control. Big Dutchman liquid feed systems and pens.

Narrandera grower Egbert Selten – a positive and focused grower



By PETER BEDWELL

Pork Journal wanted to run a positive grower story for the start of 2009 and found just what we wanted with Narrandera based grower Egbert Selten.

Chris Brewster from Ridley Agri-Products, who supply Egbert's mash for the liquid feeding systems on the farm, reported that his client was a focused pig farmer with a totally positive attitude who runs a great operation.

Evo Slots from B&M Slots, had also

mentioned Egbert's focus and ability to take over a small operation and expand it into an efficient and profitable farm in often challenging circumstances.

B&M Slots supplied the Big Dutchman liquid feeding systems and pens in Egbert's refurbished sheds and like Chris Brewster, Evo Slots has been impressed by the ability of the Narrandera based Dutch migrant farmer to get on with the job and prosper in a period when many pig farmers in Australia have given up the fight against drought, low returns and a market flooded by subsidised imports.

Egbert and his wife Alexandra grew up in Holland where the Selten family had been pig farmers for many years.

He had visited Australia, liked the place and when he found that running a viable pig farm in Holland was just getting too hard, he decided to move to Australia and acquire a farm that suited his needs and ambitions for his and the Selten family's future.

"There is a view in some circles that pig farmers coming out of Europe who have sold up their farms are loaded with cash from government funded land buy-out schemes but I'm afraid that's not quite



◁ the situation for many of us," Egbert explained.

"Our resources were limited and we had to be careful when selecting a suitable farm and when we first saw our current property, we decided to keep looking. But eventually we came to the conclusion that the farm offered potential and was our best bet – despite the fact that the area was in the grip of drought, and still is," he said.

"When we bought the farm in 2001 it was a four shed 250 sow facility with 60 sows outdoors and it was fairly labour intensive."

"There were three owners and one of them, Graham Hutchins, stayed working on the farm while we settled into the property and is still with us seven and a half years later as he now looks after our building projects," Egbert explained.

Today the farm has eight sheds, one of which is still under construction and the capacity has been increased to 420 sows.

When the final shed in the building program is complete, the capacity will have doubled over the original farm Egbert acquired back in 2001.

"We reckon 500 sows in a farrow to finish operation is enough for us," Egbert said.

"We can operate with two of us working full time solely with the pigs and one part time staff member plus our builder. More capacity would mean much higher running costs so we will stay at 500 but continue to fine tune the operation."

When the outside sows were brought into a new mating shed, Egbert opted for liquid feeding which was already installed in the original sheds.

The liquid feeding system, first installed by the previous owner, was a UK Hampshire system and though it has performed well over the years it is becoming hard to maintain and there is no agent for the product in Australia. So Egbert has to deal direct with suppliers in the UK.

He opted for Big Dutchman for his new liquid feeding system and for pens when building new grow-out sheds and both were supplied by B&M Slots.

"We used Big Dutchman on our farms in Holland so I was familiar with these products and knew that they were reliable and durable.

"The Big Dutchman pens are fabricated from stainless steel and are tough as well as long lasting and the liquid feed system is less complex than the Hampshire product in the old sheds.

"The Big Dutchman system has one tank where the Hampshire uses multiple tanks (one tank to mix the mash/slurry feeding and three separate tanks – one for each shed) which adds to the complexity and maintenance issues," he said.

The Big Dutchman liquid feeding system drops the feed slurry up to 10 times a day – there are sensors in the feed troughs to prevent overfilling.

Rations start at 2.4kg of mash per day and increases to 3.2kg at the end of the grow-out phase (around 105kg) plus water to produce the correct feed slurry.

The system adjusts automatically to a predetermined feed curve that maintains optimum growth levels and feed efficiency.

The wheat or barley based diets are supplied by Ridley and Chris Brewster, who looks after the Selten property, maintains regular contact to ensure his company's contribution to the farm's consistent results.

"Fine mash is one of the key features of the Selten farm's liquid feed diet and we

believe that this may give better dispersion in water than a coarser grain which logically would have a greater tendency to settle out," Chris said.

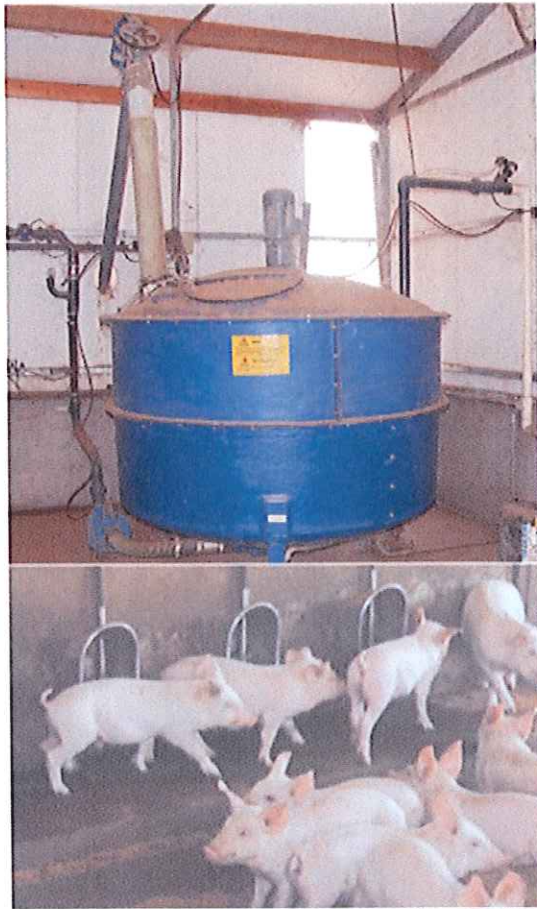
"Also Egbert has never tried to use bi-products like dairy or other food industry waste in his system and though his feed costs may be higher as a result of this policy, he has maintained good and consistent growth rates and feed conversion ratios by sticking with feed grains as the basis of the diet," he added.

Chris also remarked on the fact that Egbert used dry pellet feed in his weaner sheds and only used liquid feed diets when the pigs were transferred to the grow-out sheds.

"This seems to work well despite the fact that other farmers believe liquid feed



Top: Big Dutchman stainless steel housing crates in grow-out sheds. Above: One of the original partners in the farm now helps Egbert Build new sheds.

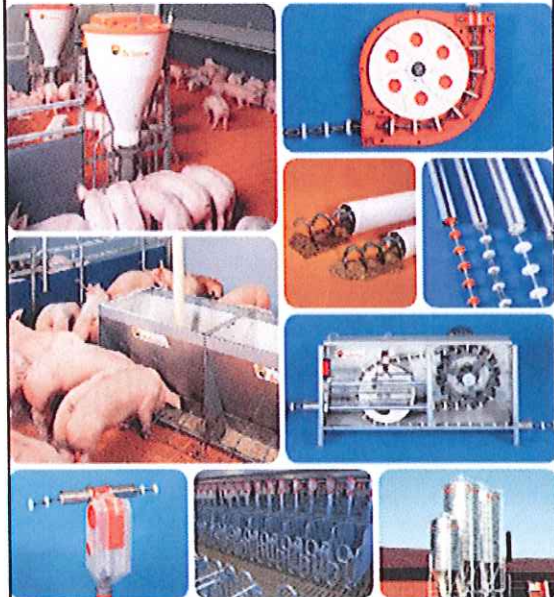


Top: Big Dutchman liquid feed tank. Egbert says it is a good system that works well. Centre: Weaners on dry feed pellets. Above: Egbert uses wheat or barley waste in slurry but no bi-products.

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◁ should be used for weaners," he said.

The key to good results with a liquid feeding system, Egbert believes, is to keep all aspects of the process as simple as possible consistent with achieving commercially successful results.

Egbert has tried wherever possible to make his sheds easy to work, with a minimum of labour.

"There is an alley in the centre of all the sheds connecting them and one person can easily shift stock from one shed to the next when necessary," he explained.

All sheds have a simple but effective automated climate control system that opens and closes shutters depending on prevailing temperatures.

The control systems are either IFS or Hotraco and, according to Egbert, they are easy to use and are robust.

The cooled farrowing shed contains 100 farrowing crates that are made by Vereyken Bros of Grafton which also supplied the pen floors.

Egbert likes the design and robustness of the Vereyken crates and informs us that apart from being popular in Australia they have even been used on Dutch pig farms.

In 2008 the farm had a farrowing rate of 2.29 litters per sow, a figure that Egbert said that he would like to improve, and they have been weaning 10 piglets per litter over the same period.

The weaner shed follows Egbert's principals of being easy to work in and maintain.

There are six areas, each with its own automated control system to take the weaners in batches of 220 pigs from 21 days to nine weeks of age when they go into the grow-out sheds.

Mortality rates at weaning from sows are 2.5% according to Egbert.

There are large doors into each of the six rooms on one outside wall of the weaner shed that allows for easy entry and room for machinery making the task of stock transfer and clean out much easier.

Once the new current shed building project is finished and capacity raised to the target 500 sows, Egbert plans to renovate the two remaining grow-out sheds from the original farm.

Apart from the fact that there is the general deterioration consistent with nearly 25 years of continual service, Egbert wants to improve the draining system and create a cleaner environment for his pigs. That project will complete his upgrade of the farm.

Genetic details on the Seltens farm are a herd of Large White crossed with Landrace with PIC 331 E for his baconers and Eastem Genetics for production of new gilts.

The farm is 100% AI but they do keep four boars in the mating shed for detection of sows on heat.

When Egbert first took over the farm and for some time after, they were sending their pigs to Castlemaine for processing but after that facility closed they switched to Collin Sinclair in Benalla who Egbert said is straight forward and easy to deal with. Typically the pigs are delivered at 78kg dressed.

"A good relationship with your processor is important in this industry as you are dependent on them to take pigs as soon as they are ready for market. Any delays can be not only costly but play havoc with a good production system," Egbert said.

When the Seltens first took over the then 250 sow, 200 acre property in July 2001, his aim was to double the capacity of the farm, have it running efficiently with a small workforce, and have the whole enterprise paid for within ten years.

Nearly eight years into that plan and

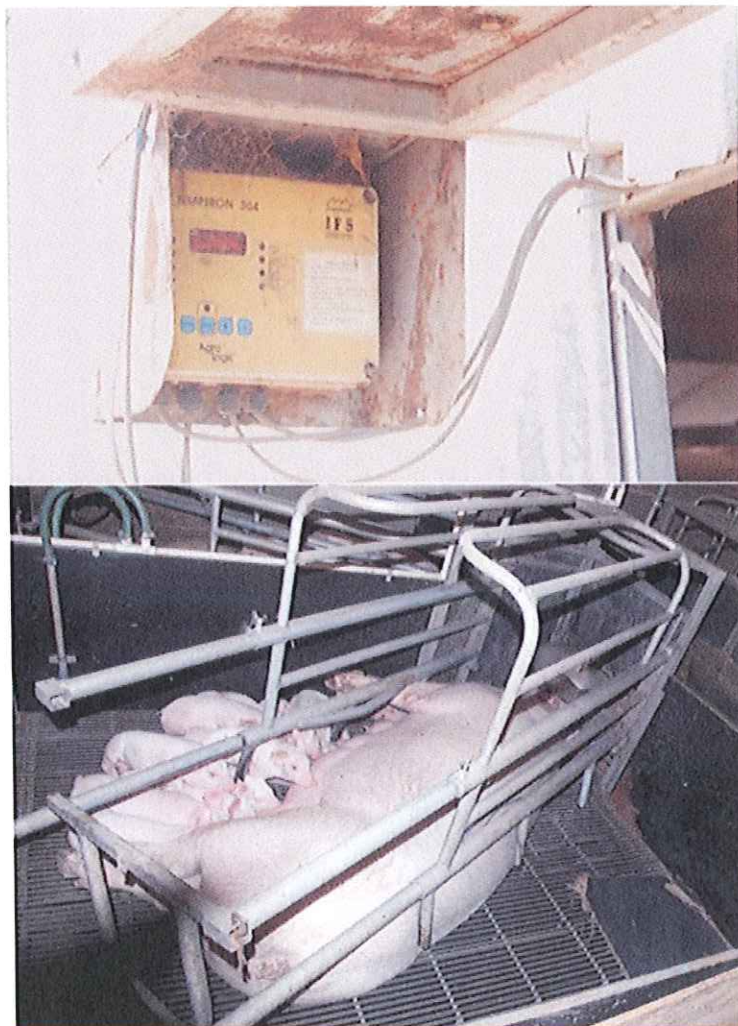
they are on target to achieve their aim and they have managed this during one of the worst periods facing the Australian pig industry.

How have the Seltens achieved such results when many have left the industry or only survived by taking on large amounts of debt?

Egbert believes that you have to focus totally on the things you can control and not waste energy worrying about things you can't.

He has put a lot of thought and effort into setting up his sheds to be efficient to operate and he has not allowed himself and his staff to be distracted by other activities like raising other livestock, such as sheep or cattle, nor has he become involved in cropping though he has acquired another 400 acres around the farm which he leases out.

Egbert is very positive about conditions ▷



Top: IFS controller is simple to use and works well in typically tough pig shed conditions. Above: Vereyken farrowing crates and floor – robust and long lasting.

◁ in Australia for pig farming, especially when compared to his native Holland and other areas of Europe.

"In Holland, farmers are facing increasingly stringent conditions for raising pigs and complying with welfare and environmental regulation has become prohibitively costly," he said.

"In Australia we have achieved a good balance between efficient production, mainstream consumer concerns and most of the regulatory authorities."

Though his farm in Narrandera has been in drought conditions since he moved onto the farm, he believes other aspects of the climate are ideal there and contribute to the overall health of his pigs.

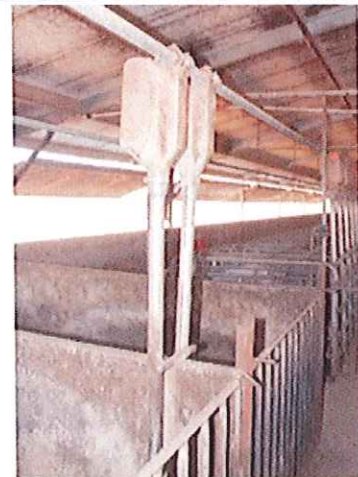
On the topic of imports he believes that with globalisation, some access to our market is inevitable but if we can keep the fresh pork market as it is, farmers should be able to make good money out of pigs providing they get the basics right.

One the topic of carcass measurement and returns to growers based on current methodology, Egbert commented he is content but that new measurement systems are not always better for the farmer.

His focus has been getting his sheds consistent with reasonable investment in refurbishment and good equipment that is robust and easy to use.

He is wary of complex automation but equally will utilise labour saving design and equipment that is easy to operate.

Egbert Selten came to Australia with a simple plan and is now reaping the rewards from sticking to the plot. His final words were "Australian pig farmers don't know how lucky they really are!" ■



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Top: Large doors on refurbished six room weaner sheds allow for ease of stock handling and cleaning. Centre: Egbert explains automated ventilation system to Alex Bedwell. Above: Big Dutchman feeder units drop slurry into feed troughs.