

Marshfield, Wis., farmer who houses 20 to 25 nursery calves in it. "It's rather high maintenance."

Otherwise, Good is impressed with how economical the structure was to build compared to a conventional barn and how well his calves do in it. "We're already seeing better growth rates in our calves because of all the additional sunlight," he says.

Good installed a 10 by 12-ft. roll-up steel garage door on the east and west ends of his barn for easier access.

"It's lived up to every expectation I had," says Lance Larson, Nortonville, Kan., about the 30 by 72-ft. canvas **BioTech** shelter he put up last August. "I finish 200 hogs in it and they perform as well or better than in conventional confinement," Larson says. "There's less dust, hogs are more comfortable, and there isn't nearly the odor there is in a conventional facility."

"I'm 100 percent satisfied with it," says Jim Albinger, Sac City, Iowa, about the 30 by 72-ft. poly **Cover-All** shelter he put up last spring for hog finishing.

"The numbers we get are very comparable to a double-curtain, total-slant confinement setup," he says. "Up-front costs were low and there's no electrical costs. Labor is minimal."

Two years ago, Archie Kuntz, of Kuntz Brothers Farms Inc., Brooklyn, Iowa, put up two 30 by 72-ft. **BioTech** canvas barns. He was so pleased with them he put up two more last year. "I wish we'd known about them 10 years ago," says Kuntz, who finishes 200 hogs in each building. "They're more environmentally friendly than conventional confinements. Maintenance costs are virtually zero. There's less odor. And we're maintaining performance stats that are equal to or better than those of conventional buildings."

"The only thing that needs improving are the end enclosures. We designed our own roll-up system that works like a hand-cranked truck tarp."

The only thing that could be improved is the roll-up tarp doors, Kuntz notes. But he adds that the company's new design for installing plywood doors promises to correct ventilation and sealing problems. (BioTech representatives told FARM SHOW the company's innovative new hinged door system that'll fit other barns too started shipping in April.)

"It does a good job, but you've got to be careful calves don't kick holes in the plastic. I set up plastic snow fence 2-ft. from the walls to stop them from doing that," says Alden DeJong about a 34 by 48-ft. single-arch **Oehmsen Midwest Inc.** barn he put up three years ago. The Hull, Iowa, farmer houses 96 Holstein calves in the structure.

"I'm impressed with it," he says. "It'll with-



One of the latest designs in low-cost structures comes from Harnois. The company has designed a way to "gang" the shelters together side-by-side with rain gutters running between buildings.

stand high winds and hail. And you can't beat the price." DeJong power ventilates the barn with Acme ventilation tubes and insulated side walls.

"It's the only way to finish hogs in today's economic environment," says Harlen Huisman, Sacred Heart, Minn., about three canvas **BioTech** barns he put up between 1991 and 1994.

"The only thing that needs improving are the end enclosures," he says. "We designed our own roll-up system that works like a hand-cranked truck tarp."

"In summer my death loss has been lower than in my conventional building. And in the winter pigs huddle down in the bedding and do just fine," says Kenny Nielsen, Medaryville, Ind. He has three 30 by 54-ft. canvas **Cover-All** shelters, put up in 1994. He finishes 120 hogs in each. "Price per head was the big draw. It was so much less than conventional," Nielsen says. "Plus, there are fewer repairs and less maintenance than with a conventional structure."

"As far as I know I'm the only farmer in the world using it for this purpose," says Doug Parker about the 24-ft. **Harnois** building he put up last year. The Shelburne, Vt., dairyman uses it as a milking parlor for 12 cows.

"It works every bit as well as a conventional milking parlor," says Parker. "But if I had it do over again, I'd put up a gable-frame building, partly because it would shed ice and snow better. I understand the company is putting up a first-of-its-kind gable-frame building in Ontario, also to be used as a milking parlor."

Wayne Yost, Wrens, Ga., bought a 36 by 70-ft. building from **Diamond Equipment** a year ago and uses it as a portable shop for his earthmoving equipment business. "It's a handy place to repair equipment on rainy days. We keep a trailer-mounted welder, a portable torch, drill press, and chop saw in it. It's stable in high winds and at night we can lock it up. I paid \$4,700 for it and used square steel tubing to build a 5-ft. high frame that serves as a portable base. I can easily disassemble the base and move it and the building to a new work site. Earth anchors and come-alongs hold it down."

Ron Brubacher, Elora, Ontario, uses 11 **Super Structure** buildings to finish hogs. He put the first two up almost four years ago and bought the other nine last year.

"We're very satisfied with them. They're relatively inexpensive and hogs gain fast in them. We use an auger to deliver feed to hoppers mounted inside the pens. We use a round bale chopper to spread straw for bedding, backing up to one end of the building to blow straw into the pens. Both ends of the buildings are covered and have a 15-ft. wide center section that rolls up out of the way. I made a bracket that allows the sections of tarp around the doors to be quickly removed which allows more air movement during the summer. In the winter we go through a lot of straw but it makes good fertilizer."

"We use our 50 by 140-ft. **Diamond Equipment** building as a horse riding arena. We train

Do Low-Cost Shelters Really Save Money?

Compared with conventional confinement buildings, low-cost "alternative" barns may save you a bundle in construction costs, but it'll also raise your labor costs and lower productivity.

The upshot is that net income per animal is virtually even with that of a conventional confinement building.

That's the conclusion of a first-of-its-kind two-year study conducted by researchers at Quality Swine Co-op, a member-owned cooperative at Shedden, Ontario.

Doug Wheeler tracked performance of separate groups of pigs with similar genetics, sex ratios, and feed rations in both a BioTech soft-sided barn and a conventional hog building. The tests were repeated three times to verify results.

In the study, a comparison was made of average daily gain, days to market, feed consumption, feed efficiency and carcass measurements.

Results showed lower performance in

average daily gain (1.56 lbs. conventional vs. 1.53 BioTech), feed conversion (3.21 vs. 3.33 per lb.) and standard Ontario grading index (108.7 vs. 107.5).

Comparing capital costs, BioTech shelters were \$12,000 (Canadian) for structure and \$2,000 for equipment. Costs for conventional were \$37,880 and \$8,146, respectively.

In the end, however, net income per pig was \$10.17 for the conventional structure and \$8.53 for the BioTech shelter. A major factor in lower net return per pig in the BioTech shelter was the more costly high nutrient density diet pigs required. Researchers noted that it's economically essential to do a cost-benefit analysis to assess the impact of using alternate diets to increase performance in BioTech-type barns.

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horses inside it all winter before we sell them. Works great," says Paul Stinn, Council Bluffs, Iowa. "Both ends are closed and we have a steel sliding door on one end. It was inexpensive to put up. Once in a while we have to tighten the sides down or do a little patching of the material."

"We haven't found much fault with our three **Super Structure** buildings," says Glen Herlick, Stratford, Ontario, who bought his first unit seven years ago. "We have two 30 by 70-ft. buildings and use one for storing round hay bales and the other as a machinery shed. We keep calf hutches inside our 20 by 70-ft. building. It keeps calves out of the sun and out of the snow. We put veal calves in when they weigh about 250 lbs. and feed them to about 700 lbs. Air circulation is much better than in a regular barn."

"We spent just \$4,200 for our 30 by 70-ft. building whereas a comparable conventional building would have cost at least \$18,000. Also, we can easily move them if we ever want to. All of our buildings are open on both ends. Last year we stacked round straw bales three high at each end of the calf building to block the wind and to reduce the amount of snow that gets inside."

"My brother and I set up a 30 by 72-ft. **Dia-**

mond Equipment building last fall and kept cattle in it over the winter. Now we're using it as a finishing building for 160 hogs. We really like it," says Allen Penner, Elma, Manitoba. "There's a feeder and waterer at one end of the building. The ground gets pretty churned up there so we plan to pour a cement pad. It's less expensive than a conventional building but is more labor intensive. We roll out round straw bales by hand to provide bedding and go through two bales per week. Both ends of the building are open, with a rail fence at each end. If we still have pigs in it next winter we'll probably cover the ends."

Kevin Snyder, Logansport, Ind., bought a 35 by 70-ft. **Diamond Equipment** building last fall and so far has used it to store big square bales of straw. "We run a cow calf operation and intend to use the building to feed calves to market weight. However, before putting calves in we want to build a fence around it to make a feedlot. I like the cost savings and was able to put up the building by myself. Both ends are open but one end faces some woods. Also, the building runs in an east-west direction so cold north winds can't blow straight in. We need more hay storage so we may put up two more buildings."



"You see a return on your investment much sooner than you do with a conventional building," says David Paul, Hancock, Minn., about the 35 by 90-ft. canvas **American Shelter** barn he put up last spring. He finishes 210 hogs in the front 70 ft. and stores straw bales in the rear 20 ft. "Feed conversion is acceptable," Paul says. "Labor requirements are minimal. And pigs are comfortable."

Paul modified the building by wrapping the top tarp over the ends of the building. "Ends look like an old covered wagon and give me a better seal against the elements," he says.

