



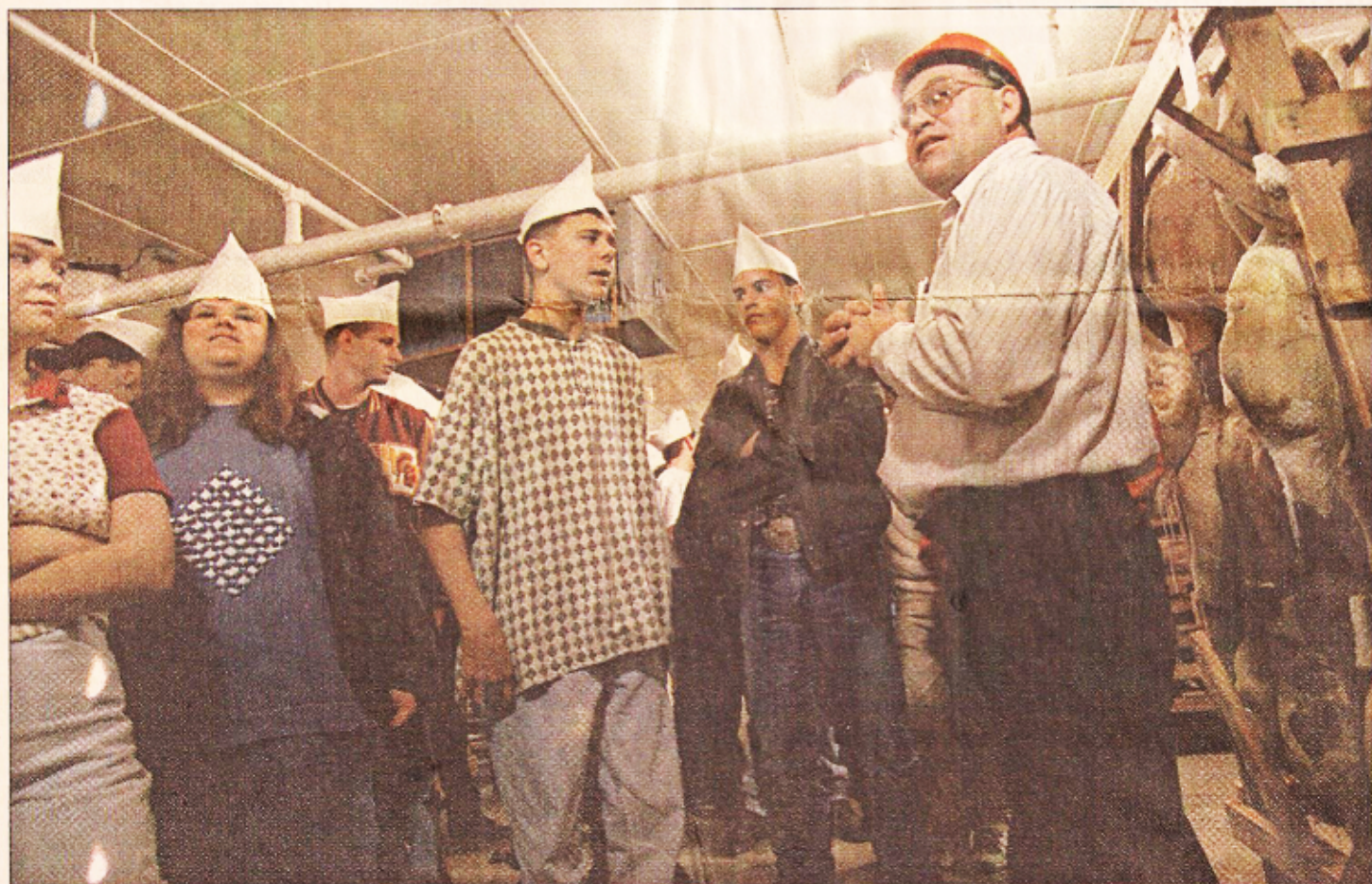
SECTION **B**

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WAKE EDITION

Nonbelievers in hog heaven



During a field trip designed to counteract some of hog farming's recent bad publicity, students from Harnett Central High School learn about pork processing from Lloyd Monds, plant manager at Tomahawk Farms Inc. in Dunn.

PHOTO BY STEVE EGAN FOR THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Visiting students turn up their noses at the smell of success

By GLENNA B. MUSANTE
STAFF WRITER

DUNN — The Harnett County Cooperative Extension Service, hoping to encourage local youths to consider entering the county's growing hog farm industry, took more than 100 students from Triton and Harnett Central high schools to a hog farm in Dunn.

But leave it to teenagers to zip straight to the heart of a matter. Instead of picturing themselves in potential careers in hog husbandry, students interviewed after this week's tour summed the experience up with two words:

It stinks.

And they were right. On a given day, the 750 hogs contained in the buildings at Weeks farm near Dunn generate the defecation equivalent of about 1,500 human beings, and it all goes into one big open pit.

Even though there's nothing quite like the bitter smell of a hog lagoon, especially if you live downwind on a hot, humid day, the swine industry is growing in Harnett County, said Jennifer Walker, director of the local agriculture education office, who headed the tour.

In Harnett County, there are 16 big hog operations. The largest, Northside Farms,

has 6,600 hogs. According to the state Department of Agriculture, the hog industry has grown 150 percent in Harnett since 1990, when a head count of hogs on hand was 18,000. In 1995, there were 46,000.

The Weeks Farm in Dunn is a breeding operation described by local extension agents as a model for its cleanliness and reuse of lagoon wastes as fertilizer. Although pathways were clean throughout the buildings where the sows are impregnated and have their litters, students noticeably winced at the general smell as

Hogs

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they stepped off the school bus.

The tour was part of Harnett County's celebration of Farm-City Week, a statewide event coordinated by extension offices statewide to foster understanding between farmers and city folk. Joe Zublena, who coordinates the Cooperative Extension's programs statewide, said each county selects its own topic for Farm-City Week.

"It's an annual event," said Phil Burleson, who teaches agricultural science at Harnett Central High School, to "show that these people are good for us." In previous years, Harnett's high school agriculture students have toured plant nurseries, poultry houses, and textile factories.

Walker said Harnett's Farm-City Week committee selected hog farming to highlight the industry's plus side — jobs and revenue, with the

hope that "this might counteract some of the negative publicity hog farming has been getting recently," she said.

But even students who live on farms seemed anxious to leave. For sanitation reasons, visitors were asked to wear plastic booties and paper jackets while walking through the pig houses. In the farrowing house, students saw 500 pound sows in tight quarters nursing piglets, then went to another building where breeding pigs are kept and mated in 12-by-12 stalls. Ryan Weeks, who runs the operation, said that a sow can give birth to two litters per year, sometimes more, and that the breeders live on a schedule which keeps them constantly at some stage of breeding.

Brian Parrish, Harnett's livestock agent, noted that a growing number of county tobacco farmers are worried about the future of the golden leaf and see a future in hogs.

But there is resistance in the

community. Parks Blake of the county soil conservation office said neighbors of a proposed hog farm 6 miles west of Lillington don't want it in their neighborhood because of the smell and concerns this will bring down their property values.

Carl Dean, city manager of Dunn, said he is familiar with the Weeks

farm and knows of no complaints about odors there. Ryan Weeks, who runs the farm's hog houses, said his family has been in the business since the 1960s, and points out that his father's house is just up a dirt road from the hog sheds and lagoon. She said they set an example of how hog farms should run.