



**Contributed photo**

*Brad Hennen poses with the pig chute he invented. The invention has earned him a trip to Puerto Rico as a semifinalist for the Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge.*

## **Hennen's pig chute invention to make vaccinations easier, safer**

BY:

SCOTT THOMA, [SCOTT@THOMABOOKS.COM](mailto:SCOTT@THOMABOOKS.COM)

Any time you can save time, money and wear and tear on your body while doing an even more proficient job, it seems to be too good to be true.

Brad Hennen, who has a finishing barn outside of Ghent that holds approximately 750 pigs, has done just that with his invention of a pig conveyor chute that restrains pigs in order to make it much easier to vaccinate them.

The new chute also is a way to reduce broken needles that sometimes occurs during the vaccination process when pigs are difficult to manage.

So impressive is Hennen's creation of the pig chute, the personable farmer was recently selected as one of 10 semifinalists in the 2023 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge. Hennen and the other nine semifinalists from across the country each receive \$10,000 to assist with the promotion and production of their inventions. These semifinalists are invited to opportunity to travel to Puerto Rico from Jan. 6-9 to promote and pitch their products at the annual American Farm Bureau Federation Convention in San Juan.

"I'm very excited," Hennen admitted. "It's been a fun project and I had always felt it had the promise to work."

The semifinalists will receive training for pitching their product from faculty members of Cornell University's S.C. Johnson College of Business. They will also network with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Business Investment Program throughout this fall. The other semifinalists come from all over the country, including one from Hawaii.

The Ag Innovation Challenge winner will receive \$50,000, while the runner-up receives \$20,000. An additional \$5,000 is award for the People's Choice winner.

Hennen came up with the idea for the pig chute when working with a cattle chute at his father and brother's farms.

"I starting thinking about this project ever since I attended the National Pork Board task force meeting on Feb. 1, 2018," said Hennen.

"They were discussing a way to prevent broken needles in pork during vaccination and that got me thinking. It's funny, but the pork producers had never been able to come up with a way to restrain pigs during vaccination."

When Hennen was later presenting his proposed idea to the task force, one of the pork board members steered him to a packing plant in Storm Lake, Iowa, where they utilize a conveyor belt to stun the pigs.

When Hennen felt he had all the components figured out for the pig chute, he took his idea to Doug Anderson at Marshall Machine Shop just over three years ago.

"I showed Doug the idea and asked him if this was something he could do," Hennen explained. "And he was able to make a prototype for me."

The conveyor portion of the chute has two belts on each side that form a "V" shape to secure the pig. The Hennen Pig Chute is now being manufactured by a Hutterite Colony in South Dakota. Several have been purchased by hog farmers.

The Hennen Pig Chute is adjustable in order to restrain pigs of various heights and weights. It works like a conveyor belt, lifting each pig slightly off the ground while transporting them along the chute.

"Typically, it will restrain pigs from 10 to 40 pounds," Hennen explained. "Pigs don't want to go single file, so this chute is designed for them to go one at a time so it's much easier to vaccinate. It's all designed to get the pig's feet up off the ground. Once the pig is lifted up slightly, it has no where to go until after it's out of the chute."

Smaller pigs are easier to vaccinate the traditional way as one person holds the pig while another administers the vaccination. As they get bigger, though, it becomes much more difficult to vaccinate that way. So, often as they are scrambling around, a vaccination needle can break off in the pig. Also, vaccinating can become time-consuming and exhausting to a farmer.

This pig chute alleviates both of those problems, while also putting less stress on the pig, more effective disease control, better management of dosage of vaccines and less workman's compensation claims.

"Farmers are able to vaccinate many more pigs this way in a shorter period of time than ever before," Hennen said. "And it's a lot less strenuous this way."

Hennen's website was designed by Dawn Van Keulen.

Visit [www.hennenpigchute.com](http://www.hennenpigchute.com) for more information.