

A Farm For Learning



Ira Wyman

Children visiting the cows at Macomber Farm.

By SUSAN DAAR

For those generations growing up and growing older out of earshot of a rooster's good morning, there is Macomber Farm, a blend of working farm, petting zoo and state-of-the-art educational facility. The two-year-old complex, set on 46 acres not far from the Massachusetts Turnpike in Framingham (22 miles west of Boston) was designed by the New York firm of Edwin Schlossberg for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Not surprisingly, then, what distinguishes Macomber (pronounced MAY-kumber) from other farm-cum-museum-cum-schools is that visitors may appreciate not only farming from the farmer's point of view, but also *being farmed* from the animal's point of view. At Macomber, it is not enough to cultivate the acquaintance of a thoroughbred horse, a Holstein cow or a 2½-year-old, 450-pound Yorkshire sow. One may see the world as the animal sees it; the farm supplies the mechanical and electronic means to do so.

machine gives an explanation: "Yes," it says. "Piglets struggle to be boss so they can get the most milk, so the piglet nursing there is boss while the litter stays together."

At the barn's exit are two more special displays. A computer terminal will answer pre-programmed basic questions about pigs on various levels — primary reader, adult or "in-depth" — depending upon the inquirer's choice.

In the main part of the barn are the subjects of all this begadgeted interest. Well within petting distance are the 450-pound sow named Big Mama, snoozing stonelike, and nearby a Yorkshire boar named Hot Shot or a Duroc sow named Cherry.

The barn, like all those on the farm, is a nice place to live in, not to mention visit: It has high ceilings, skylights and exhaust fans; its concrete floors are immaculate and its pig bedding retains the heady, sweet scent of fresh hay.

Except for the 200-year-old New England barn, almost every exhibit has binoculars and a ramp to encourage seeing and walking like each