

Workshop Title: Pastured Pork

Speaker(s) & their titles: Tarrah Young, Green Being Farm

Executive Summary : Tarrah Young raises pastured pork at her farm in Ontario. She uses black and red heritage breeds, mainly Berkshires, to a heft weight of 350-400 lbs. She direct markets her products, with each pig garnering 25 packages of meat for her customers. She provides tips on feed and forage ratios, breeds to choose from, and examples of other farmers` methods to show how to best raise pastured pork. Tarrah raises fourteen pigs. Her experience is from working on farms in the US and from a pastured pork school in Atlanta. She raises her pigs to 9 months ; they are just over 2 months when she gets them.

Detailed Notes:

Pig History :

- Pasturing pigs was common up until the 1950s ; most pigs now are bred/raised indoors.
- 13 pigs turned into about 1 million feral hogs (!!!) in Florida. Pig grazer professionals used to herd pigs to control the populations. Pigs were moved indoors due to development of cholera vaccine (beforehand, fresh air could prevent the disease). High protein feed was invented (pigs are omnivores, ate snakes and mice outside). Forest turned into an industrial space (pine plantations).

The Pork Paradigm shift :

- Pastured pork good source of vitamin D (stored in fat – good in fatter heritage varieties).
- Health value and good taste in fat of pork.
- Tarrah raises 350 – 400 lbs for good fat/flavour.
- Sun-burns can be an issue in pastured pork – red and black heritage varieties are good to stave this off.

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- Shift in foods for pigs – create identity for your pork by choosing what you feed them (this can change the flavour of pork. Tarrah finishes her pigs on apples.)
- 1000 dollar gross for pigs (high value per pig).

Slaughterhouses – may not want to take black heritage pigs (larger, more difficult to remove hair).

Breeds :

- Red pigs – vigorous growth (Red Wattle Hog, Duroc, Tamworth)
- Black pigs – good carcass (Berkshire, Large Black)
- White pigs – high litter size, good temperament (Chester White, Gloucestershire Old Spot).

Red wattle hog :

- Grown rapidly, good moms, litters of 10 – 15.

Tamworth :

- Good bacon breed. Lean pork. Can be aggressive.

Berkshire :

- Famous for their flavour. Darker meats (butt chops will be red). Raised in industrial conditions, and now are bred like white pigs. Not uncommon to get five or six pigs per litter (small, inefficient).

Large Black :

- Large pigs, not as fatty as Berkshire. Docile. Big ears can obstruct vision (evolved to cover eyes while pig is crashing through brambles in the forest).

Iron Age (cross between wild boar and Tamworth) :

- Gamey flavour. More manageable than wild boar.

Mangalitsa :

- Hungarian breed, extremely fat. More unsaturated (melts at lower temperature – melts on your tongue).

Chester White :

- Heritage breed, good at pasturing. Large litters. Good to cross these sows with other heritage boars.

Gloucestershire Old Spot :

- Good foresters, « orchard pig ». Uncommon in Canada.

Happy pigs taste better ! Well exercised pigs taste better ! Don't settle on most available breed – find one that works well for you, that you are excited about raising. Call CFIA to find out how to bring in heritage breeds. There may be some complications with

importing pigs from the US, which can be easily navigated by calling CFIA to help with the process.

What Else to Look For In a Pig :

- Go to other hog farms : what is your personal reaction ?
- Check for their breathing habits; there can be respiratory issues in pigs (usually not in pastured pigs, though).
- Organic pigs are weaned at around 8 weeks, conventional ones for shorter periods of time (you can ask conventional operations to keep piglets for a longer period of time, they may oblige). Piglets are healthier the longer you let them nurse.
- Check for temperaments.
- Watch out for the runts ; they stay small.

What To Feed Pigs ?

Grain :

- Must feed pigs grain (with some exceptions).
- Pigs are not ruminants – they will not gain weight on grass. Up to 200 lbs, a large percentage of what they eat will be grain.
- Pigs are omnivores – and require lots of energy.
- Four pounds of feed makes a pound of meat.
- They will eat around 800 lbs of feed during their lifetime (9 months).
- Pigs will self-regulate – keep an eye on what they are eating and monitor how are hungry they can be as you develop a feeding schedule.
- Feed is around 4% of their body weight.
- Soak grain before feeding to release phosphorous from phytic acid, which pigs do not absorb (phosphorous is important for bone strength). Pre-soak supper at breakfast feeding; and breakfast feeding at supper the night before.

Protein :

- Pigs need 16% protein.
- Pigs need a diversity of protein, not just corn and soy. (See slide for protein percentages of various feeds.)

Nutrients :

- Provide supplements for pigs to ensure that they receive all essential nutrients.
- Don't feed pigs fish waste supplements three weeks or less before slaughter.
- Some supply kelp and salt (for nutrients) and lime and wood ash (for deworming) and charcoal (for detoxifying) to pigs – they select when they need these things. Check what you can use if you are certified organic.
- Audience comments : In NS, you can feed pigs produce department waste. Restaurant waste may contain meat, which may infect pigs with trichinosis, so avoid if possible.

Rations :

- Can buy grain or grow it on your own. See « Pearson's Square » for balancing feed.

Pasture :

- Important to recognize that pasturing pigs is more than feed supplement. Fresh air is great (as opposed to the feed barns...). Exercise is great – the more blood running through the pigs, the more nutrients reach all parts of the meat. Cost is lower, pigs are happier.
- Weaners spend first couple of weeks in shelter. First week, the pigs don't go outside so to get used to humans. Second week, the pigs are trained to get used to electric wire. Third week, board fences are behind the wire. Fourth week, pigs are trained to further respect boundaries. Throughout this process, Tarrah's pigs still have access to the barn. Audience comments that their pigs farrow outside only, as long as they have straw to burrow into.

Pasturing Systems :

- Pasture crops must meet all five requirements that Tarrah outlines.
- Below 220 lbs, pigs cannot easily metabolize green forages. Up to 30% is okay below 220 lbs ; after 220lbs pigs will gain weight using mostly green forages.

Monitoring Weight :

- Tarrah knows they are ready for slaughter when she can ride them (!!!)

Three categories of pig pasture :

- 1) Permanent paddocks
- 2) Annual forages (seeded by you for your pigs)
- 3) Hogged down crops (pigs seed this themselves)

- Tarrah used white clover, black mettick (summer). Pigs love to forage peas and corn.

- If pigs are outside, they cannot sweat and can die of heat stroke. Shade and wallows are important.

What Else Can Pigs Eat ?

- Manure – « predigested grass », good source of B12. Comfrey is as well, but is bad for pigs' kidneys and they may not eat it.
- Pigs are complementary to another crop/product that produces waste (eg, cracked eggs, market garden, whey).

Exemptions To The Rule :

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- Walter Jeffreys uses 90% pasture, 7% dairy, the rest produce. Sugar Mountain Farm in Vermont has a great blog to check out.
- Louis Bromfield in 1955 wrote a book on his hog farming experience. His pigs only ate cow manure (full access to milking barn, grazed with steers). The pigs preferred the manure to a protein supplement. Cows only use 10% of what they eat ; 90% is left in the manure.
- Joel Salatin's Pasturing system brings in 30-50 pigs per month. First three months, indoors with feed. Introduced to paddocks at three months, finishes in « finishing pastures » in the forest, where they eat lots of acorns. He moves the animals when the feeder is empty. Once pigs impact soil, species like thistle (which pigs do not like) will start to grow. Pigs will start rooting when soil is wet, so good to move them before that happens.
- Savannah provides shade, forest, shelter, good view of predators. Oak forests provide acorns for pigs. Pigs tend to keep down softwood, but don't damage hardwood species.

Rotational System :

- 5-10 pigs should be moved because of worms and potential pasture damage. Rotation : 1/3 acre for three weeks, 2 acres over 18 weeks. Till the area and sow a forage after rotation.
- An acre of alfalfa can support 25 pigs, feeder to finish.
- Bring in pigs to clean up your rotated spring-summer-fall garden.
- Pigs are great at keeping back forests and managing fencerows.

Putting Pigs to Work :

- May not work in heavy soil. Touch and go – pigs work a little here, a little there.
- Pig-aerator pork – getting pigs to turn your compost piles.
- Pigs following cattle can be a dead-end host for cattle parasites (act as a sterilizer).
- Use pigs as a complementary enterprise – most efficient way to keep them is to have them feed on central enterprises waste.

Pig Health :

- Diatanaceous earth – feed grade is great for external or internal parasites. Make a paste for external application on skin (to avoid breathing it in). Internal use is great for prevention and treatment both. Once a week, feed pigs only DE, raw

garlic, and milk (for taste). Worms have three-week life cycle which can be killed effectively by this method. Do maybe three times a year.

- Allow pigs access to wormwood, plantain, charcoal, wood ash so that pigs can choose their own medicines.

Pasture Farrowing :

- Some farmers let pigs go into woods and then come back with piglets. Sows can eat almost 100% pasture (just maintaining weight, not gaining). Up to 300% more vitamin E in milk, higher selenium content as well.

Farrowing Hut Examples:

- Only have to provide pigs with options, they know what to do to make a nest.
- Sows will protect their young readily – humans must be careful, and predators are not much of an issue.
- Use a higher energy feed in winter.

Slaughter:

- To find weight, measure length x girth x girth divided by 400 will be the weight of the pig. More accurate predictions over the 200lb mark.
- Loading pigs: bring pigs into trailer by putting their feed in there a few days before slaughter to keep pigs stress-free on slaughter day.
- Choosing and abattoir: find one that you like.

Processing Costs:

- Cut & wrap fee will go up depending on weight.
- There's a fine line between fattening the pig and making it obese – butcher will cut off excess fats.

Live Hog Weight Equivalents:

- Dressed weight is about 70%, which is what you pay for during cut & wrap.
- Packaged meat is about 57% of live weight.

Marketing:

- People don't expect to pay much for pork; they are paying for the heritage pastured pork experience. People will buy feel-good meat, which is worth something to the consumer. Make sure you reflect these ideas in your pricing. Often, first sales do not make any money. Try to build relationships with customers and clients, who sell your product through word of mouth.

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- 20% of your customers make up 80% of sales. Send out newsletters to let these clients know how to cook the pork. Pamper them with samples. Share the health benefits of pork.

Size:

- Greg Gunthorp of Indiana direct markets 1200 hogs per year. Direct marketing is the best way to capture every dollar that the customer is paying.
- Lard is good for you!
- Omega-3 fatty acids are higher on pastured pork.

Options for sales:

- Bundles (25 bags of mixed cuts is what Tarrah does for pigs).

Pricing:

- Recognize all aspects of the operation. Eg, trip to slaughterhouse, driving time to pick up feed, time spent on the computer should all be reflected in the cost of the pork.

Audience comments:

- Tarrah uses scrubland and wooded areas to provide food for her pigs, not necessarily pastured land.
- Automatic feeders – number one aspect is that it holds a lot of feed. Flaps on the top and the bottom allow the feed to stay dry. These allow pigs to self-feed. Downside is that grain is not soaked.
- Direct marketing – Tarrah doesn't consider restaurants to be direct sales. She relies on word of mouth for her marketing. Best way to sell meat is to have people taste it.
- Not castrating boars can lead to a tainted taste in meat – Tarrah castrates all of her boars at eight weeks.