

The Business Side of Pig Farming

Farmers are motivated to do what is right for their animals and the land not only because they have a solemn duty to do so, but also because it's just good business. Healthy and comfortable animals grow, and this is what determines success for livestock farmers. The majority of hog farmers also raise crops and are aware that when land is properly tended and cared for, it continues to produce healthy crop yields. Farmers know that business success depends upon doing the right things for animals, the environment and their communities.

The success of hog farming in America has a significant impact on many related businesses and for our nation's economy as a whole, too. Consider:

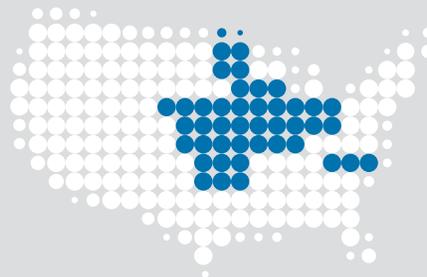


Changing Dynamics Have Brought Specialization, More Consumer Choice

Today, there are more than 69,000⁴ U.S. hog farms that produce pork to meet a wide variety of marketplace demands. Overall, greater efficiencies and growth in productivity have resulted in a more abundant, affordable supply of pork to consumers in the United States and abroad. These changing dynamics also have fostered a variety of farm sizes and types today. Some farms specialize in raising certain breeds, others focus on pigs at specific stages of development and yet others raise pigs to meet various consumer niche demands. Whether large or small, the basic tenets of animal agriculture remain the same: good animal care, stewardship of the land, production of safe, wholesome food and care for employees and communities. These are the core values that the pork industry strives to uphold.

Raising Pigs in America

Sixty-two percent of the U.S. pig herd is raised in Corn Belt states, where the farmers have relatively easy access to the region's abundant supplies of feed grains and soybean meal. Another 15 percent of the U.S. herd is in North Carolina.⁵



State Rankings by Number of Hogs

1. Iowa
2. North Carolina
3. Minnesota
4. Illinois
5. Indiana
6. Missouri
7. Nebraska
8. Oklahoma
9. Ohio
10. Kansas

³USDA Economic Research Service, 2009.

⁴USDA, *Farms, Land in Farms and Livestock Operations* (2005-2011).

⁵USDA, *Hogs and Pigs Report* (December 1977-2002); *Livestock Operations* (April 2004); and *Farms, Land in Farms and Livestock Operations* (2005-2010).



Types of Hog Farms

There are five basic types of hog farming operations in the United States:

Farrow-to-finish farms manage all stages of pig growth and development, from breeding through finishing, to market weight of about 275 pounds.

Farrow-to-nursery farms specialize in the breeding of sows and raising of 40- to 50-pound feeder pigs, which are then moved to finishing farms.

Farrow-to-wean farms oversee breeding herds and raise pigs until weaned and reach weights of 10 to 15 pounds, at which time they are moved to wean-to-finish farms.

Wean-to-finish farms purchase weaned pigs and grow them until they reach market weights.

Finishing farms buy 40- to 50-pound feeder pigs and raise them until they reach market weight.



Main U.S. Hog Breeds

There are many different hog breeds, and some farmers specialize in raising one or only a few breeds. However, most commercial production comes from a blend of various breeds, often called crossbreeds, designed to produce pork with qualities demanded by the marketplace. The major breeds are:

- Berkshire
- Chester White
- Duroc
- Hampshire
- Landrace
- Poland China
- Spotted
- Yorkshire

Types of Animal Housing

Pigs can be raised completely outdoors, completely indoors or in a combination of the two. However, most pigs today are raised in specially designed barns that allow the animals to be protected from extreme weather conditions, predators, vermin, etc., and that allow farmers and veterinarians to more easily monitor the health of individual pigs. The type of animal housing used is dictated by various factors, including the farm's geographical location and climate, the facility's proximity to populated areas and whether the ultimate product will be marketed to a particular consumer niche. Experts who study animal welfare and behavior agree that an animal's environment can have an enormous impact on its health and well-being.⁶ Therefore, decisions regarding optimal housing systems should be considered on a farm-by-farm basis.

Leaner Pork to Meet Consumer Demand

Over the last 20 or so years, consumers have become more concerned about fat content. The industry has responded by breeding pigs to be leaner today than they were decades ago. Compared with pigs from the 1950s, a typical pig today has 75 percent less fat. As a result, the six most common cuts of pork are 16 percent leaner and contain 27 percent less saturated fat than they did 20 years ago.⁷

⁶Broom, 1991; Gonyou, 1986.

⁷Based on 3-ounce cooked servings (roasted or broiled), visible fat trimmed after cooking. Reference: USDA, Agriculture Research Service, 2009.