



How ● pigs are raised

A guide offering clarity on
the facts of pork production

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HOW PIGS *WERE* RAISED

Until the 1950s, most farmers produced a little of everything, including a few pigs. Most pigs were kept outdoors, which worked well when there were only a few pigs per farm. Even so, there were problems

with weather, pests, predators and disease. Frostbite on hairless ears, sunburn and insect bites were risks. Sows crushed many piglets and productivity was low, providing few pigs for market. It was a tough life for both pigs and farmers.

HOW PIGS *ARE* RAISED

Today, fewer than 2% of Canadians farm, even though the world's population has more than doubled! That means modern-day farmers must produce a lot more food to feed everyone. Pig farms have expanded, but animal care has never been compromised; in fact, quite the opposite.

Now that pigs are raised indoors, they benefit from better individualized care and improved health. Barns provide pigs with shelter and a healthy, comfortable environment in which to grow. Farmers protect their animals from disease by following strict

herd health procedures, such as showering before entering barns and routinely cleaning pig pens. Today's pigs are raised with fewer diseases, resulting in healthier pigs and a safer food supply.

Pig farmers care for their animals 365 days a year, including holidays! Maintaining pig health is a farmer's pride and passion. After all, raising pigs is not just a job; it's a way of life that will support the farmer and his or her family for many years.

Pig farmers are responsible for the daily care and management of pigs raised for pork production. Pig stewardship has evolved, but farmers have always assumed the responsibility to properly care for their animals.



THE BREEDING BARN

A male pig that fathers piglets is called a boar. Nowadays, most farmers breed female pigs by artificial insemination (A.I.), a technique that does not require direct contact with a boar. This helps to produce healthier litters and prevent injury. Boars can be quite hostile and need to be penned individually, but they are kept on the farm to help stimulate and detect estrus (or heat) in female pigs.

Until they have their first litter, young female pigs are called gilts. Once they give birth, gilts are called sows. Gilts are ready for breeding at 6-7 months of age. Signs of heat, which usually last 1-3 days, indicate a readiness for breeding. If they are not bred during this time, gilts and sows will come back into heat after about 21 days, the length of their estrus cycle.

During the first trimester, pregnant pigs are especially susceptible to miscarriage. To provide them with privacy and protection, farmers usually keep gilts and sows in

FOLLOWING HIGH STANDARDS OF CARE:

- **Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Pigs:** comprehensive guidelines that promote optimal care on farm and during transport.
- **Animal Care Assessment:** assessment of animal care practices, routinely audited by veterinarians.
- **Animal Care Act:** regulation deterring the abuse and neglect of animals.

individual pens within the breeding barn for 4-5 weeks. During this time, farmers perform pregnancy tests using ultrasound equipment. If the female pigs are not pregnant, they stay in the breeding barn. If they are pregnant, they are moved to the gestation barn.

Farmers follow several standards of animal care related to handling, feeding, air quality, transportation and more. The quality of care is essential to pigs' health and well-being.



THE GESTATION BARN

Most pregnant (or gestating) pigs are housed in the gestation barn. Their pregnancy lasts for 3 months, 3 weeks, and 3 days (about 115 days). During this time, farmers work particularly hard to reduce the sows' stress. This involves managing the sows in a way that minimizes fighting between them.

Individual maternity pens can be used to house sows during pregnancy, to reduce sows' natural aggression that may result in serious injuries. The pens also help keep sows clean and healthy, and provide for individual feeding and care. However, this type of system somewhat limits the sows' movement and ability to socialize.

Group maternity pens are another type of indoor housing system. They offer sows more freedom of movement and opportunities for social interaction, but do increase the risk of fighting.

Outdoor housing systems require more time and effort to manage, and are best suited to more temperate climates. Sows have the ability to move freely, but this leaves them exposed to the elements, as well as pests, parasites and predators. These risks can compromise the sows' health, productivity and food safety.

ENRICHING THE PIGS' ENVIRONMENT:

Pigs are naturally playful and curious. Farmers try to enrich pigs' lives by:

- Providing items for the pigs to chew and play with.
- Allowing pigs to interact with one another.
- Interacting with the pigs themselves.
- Playing music in the barn.
- Alternating the type of feed.

Today's pig farms are designed to help farmers provide the best possible care for their animals. There is no one perfect housing system. In all systems, animal welfare and food safety are a top priority.



THE FARROWING BARN

The process of birthing a litter of pigs is called farrowing. Sows are moved to the farrowing barn a few days before their expected due date. There, they are accommodated in individual farrowing pens which provide them with comfort and privacy for their arriving litter.

Depending on their age, sows will usually farrow 8-16 piglets, weighing about 1 kg (2.2 lb) each. Comparatively, the mother pig weighs between 180-300 kg (400-650 lb), making her up to 300 times heavier than her piglets! Farrowing pens are designed with adjustable rails to prevent the sow from lying down too quickly and crushing her piglets. They also have built-in creep areas to which the piglets can retreat. Heat pads and heat lamps help keep the piglets warm and comfortable, increasing their chance of survival.

Newborn piglets will start suckling from their mother's udder within a few hours of birth. Colostrum, the milk produced by the sow on

HELPING PIGLETS THRIVE:

To help piglets thrive in the farrowing barn, farmers:

- Monitor farrowing and assist sows that are having difficulties.
- Dry newborn piglets and clear fluid from their mouths and nostrils.
- Foster piglets from larger litters onto sows with smaller litters.
- Temporarily prevent larger piglets from suckling to give smaller piglets a chance.

the first day, is rich in nutrients and antibodies which enhance the newborn piglets' immunity. Farmers ensure that all piglets have access to their mother's milk during their whole suckling phase, which lasts about 3-4 weeks.

Farmers continually monitor sows and piglets during and after farrowing, doing their utmost to keep sows comfortable and piglets safe and healthy.



THE NURSERY BARN

At 3-4 weeks of age, weaned piglets are moved into nursery pens where they are housed with pigs of the same size and age. Here, weanlings are provided with fresh water and feed at all times. Farmers walk through the nursery pens routinely to make sure the pigs are eating regularly and adjusting well. To ensure weanling comfort, the nursery is kept very warm, at 24-30°C (75-86°F). Weanlings are protected from drafts, while fresh air circulates through the barn.

These group pens can contain as few as 10 or as many as 300 pigs! This is the first time a pig gets to socialize with pigs from other litters. Their social interactions can include playing, nosing, chewing and fighting. When the pigs are first put together, they will fight a little among themselves to figure out which pigs are in charge in the pens. This is normal behaviour for pigs. Once they get their “pecking order” sorted out, fighting diminishes.

Farmers often provide pigs with some enrichment to keep them occupied, decreasing destructive behaviour and opportunities for “bullying.” Weanlings remain in the nursery barn for 5-8 weeks. During this time, weanlings grow from about 6 kg (13 lb) up to about 26-30 kg (57-66 lb).

A PIG'S DIET

Farmers feed pigs a grain-based diet consisting mainly of available farm grains. Crops such as barley, wheat and corn provide pigs with energy, while soybeans and canola meal supply protein. Farmers add vitamins and minerals to the feed of newly-weaned pigs for optimum nutrition. Clean, fresh water is an essential part of a pig's diet.

Swine diets are carefully formulated to meet pigs' nutritional needs. Canadian farmers do not add growth hormones to pigs' feed.



THE FEEDER BARN

After leaving the nursery barn, pigs are moved to the feeder barn for 3-4 months, until they reach market weight. Pigs destined for market represent over 95% of all pigs born. These pigs are raised together in open, group pens for their entire lives!

Feeder pigs choose how much to eat and usually consume 2-3 kg (4.4-6.6 lb) of feed daily. When feeder pigs reach a market weight of 120-130 kg (264-286 lb), farmers move them onto special trucks to take them to market. There are strict rules for trucking pigs, and drivers are well trained to handle, care for and transport the pigs.

The Nutrient Cycle: Manure Matters! Since their feed isn't rationed, feeder pigs collectively produce more manure than any other age class. Farmers collect manure in holding pits beneath the barn and routinely transfer it to outdoor storage facilities. Since hog manure is prized as a valuable organic fertilizer and soil conditioner, farmers incorporate

HUMANE EUTHANASIA

Despite receiving the best possible care, pigs sometimes become sick or injured. When this occurs, the farmer will treat a sick or injured pig in a specialized "hospital" pen. If the pig does not recover, it is humanely euthanized. Humane and timely euthanasia is an emotionally difficult task for the farmer, but it prevents the pig from suffering.

it into their fields to help crops grow. This is done in a sustainable manner, in accordance with government approved manure management plans and numerous regulations governing the handling of manure. In turn, harvested crops may become feed for livestock or turned into food for human consumption. This recycling of manure nutrients for crop production is referred to as the "nutrient cycle."

Over 95% of all pigs in Canada are raised in open, group pens.

Candles footwear bonding agent

crayons safety gloves gelatin

marshmallows

fabric softener leather jackets



insulin footwear bonding agent

food thickener

PIG PRODUCTS

Pigs are raised for a variety of meats such as bacon, ham and pork chops. We also appreciate pigs for the many additional products they provide.

Some examples include:

Medicines – Insulin from the pancreas and about 40 other pharmaceuticals are made with help from pigs. Blood vessels, tendons, heart valves and tissue are used in a number of medical procedures on humans. As well, pig gelatin is used to harden the shells of medicine-containing capsules.

Household Items – Fatty acids from the bone are used in a variety of everyday products like candles, crayons, paint, fabric softener, soap, shampoo and lipstick. The hair from pigs can be used to make durable paintbrushes or processed into fertilizer.

Paper and Film – Bone collagen and gelatin is used to improve the stiffness of paper and as a bonding agent in photographic film.

Foodstuffs – Gelatin from pig skin is used to thicken and texturize many common foods like ice cream, butter, marshmallows and chewy sweets. Gelatin is also used to clarify beverages like beer, wine and fruit juices by absorbing the particles that would otherwise leave them cloudy.

Leathers – Pig hide is used in many products, from safety gloves to footballs and footwear, to leather jackets.

Alternative Energy – Even products that would otherwise go to waste are sometimes used as fuel to produce electricity.

What do marshmallows, lipstick, beer and crayons have in common? They are made from pig by-products! There are over **185 different uses** for the pig, besides providing us with meat.

No other animal provides us with a wider range of products than the pig. By-products constitute an estimated 30% of the live weight of market hogs, while about 60% is used for meat.



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