

Discovering Pigs

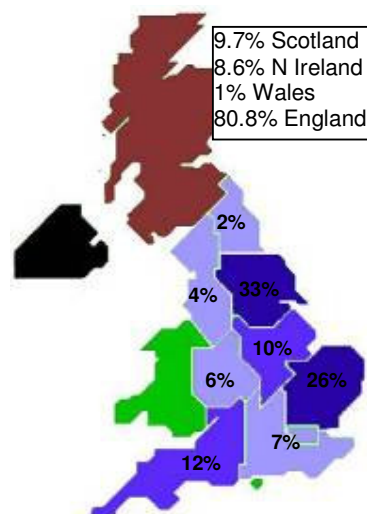
Pigs were first domesticated in China at least 9,000 years ago. But, historical accounts refer to the keeping of swine in Britain as early as 800 BC. The modern breeds of today emerged at this time when Robert Bakewell crossed the indigenous European pig with a Chinese strain.

Modern Farming

Pig keeping has come along way since the days of having a pig in the backyard and feeding them food scraps. Pig production in the 21st Century is a skilled job, requiring experienced stockpeople to look after the pig's welfare and help them thrive.

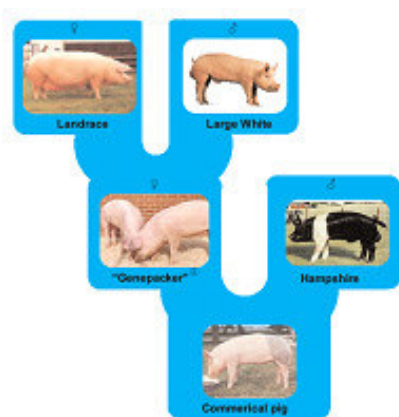
Today's consumer demands lean meat which has been raised in an environmentally and welfare-friendly system. As a result over 92% of pig farms produce pigs in accordance with an assurance scheme. Many companies produce meat for 'niche markets' allowing them to gain a premium for the welfare standards the animals were raised in and quality of meat that they produce. Although the pig population is spread throughout the UK, 60% of the pigs are kept in Yorkshire and East Anglia (see figure 1).

Distribution of pigs in England

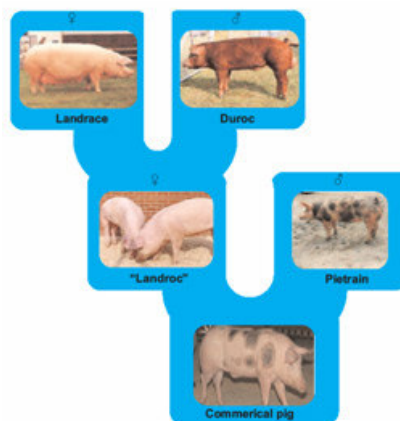


Breeds

In the UK a variety of breeds are used depending on the type of system that the pig will be grown in.



Indoor Breeds



Outdoor Breeds

NB the 'Genepacker[®]' and 'Landroc[®]' are commercial names for breeding companies specific cross breeds



Breeding companies cross different breeds to select the good points known as traits. Some of the breeds used today are shown above. Typically a Large White / Landrace cross is used for indoor systems and outdoor systems use the Duroc crossed with a Landrace. Breeds native to England are making a come back. These breeds are perceived as having tastier meat and are produced for niche markets.

Pig Farming Facts

- There are two main stages in pig production, breeding – the production of piglets and finishing – the rearing of piglets up to a target slaughter weight.
- The UK has 470,000 breeding sows of which 70% are kept indoors.
- The average herd size in the UK is 500 sows.
- 9 million pigs slaughter pigs are produced each year, of this 4% are finished outside, 65% inside on straw systems and 31% inside on slatted systems.
- A male pig is known as a boar. A female pig is known as a gilt before she has her first litter of piglets and a sow afterwards.
- When a sow is not feeding piglets (lactating) they are known as dry sows.
- Pregnancy in a pig lasts for 3 months 3 weeks and 3 days, having piglets is known as farrowing. A sow will farrow twice a year.
- On average a litter will have 12 piglets, with each piglet weighing around 1kg.
- Piglets spend the first 3-4 weeks of life with the sow suckling (feeding off milk), before they are 'weaned'.
- During the first week piglets may be given iron injections, and some will have their teeth clipped and part of their tail docked.
- Teeth clipping prevents the piglets damaging the sow's teats and udder and reduces the chance of them injuring each other during play.
- Only the end of the tail that contains no nerves is allowed to be removed using special clippers to avoid it being chewed as a 'toy' by other piglets.
- Outdoor pig production is only possible on light free draining soils typically found in East Anglia, along the M4 corridor and in parts of Yorkshire and Aberdeenshire
- At weaning, the piglets are removed from the sow and given solid food.
- Feed makes up 60 per cent of the production costs within rearing and finishing.
- Normally pig rations comprise cereals, protein, minerals and vitamins.
- A pig's diet must be well balanced and meet the needs of the pig which means it will have to change at different stages of growth.
- In the UK, pigs are sold for meat between 20 and 26 weeks old and will weigh 70–100kg. In Europe they are sold heavier – 115kg.
- Pigs in the UK are not castrated, but are throughout much of the rest of Europe.
- 'Entire' pigs (not castrated) are more efficient in converting feed to meat.
- Pigs can easily get stressed, and will fight if their groups are mixed.
- Less than 1% of pigs are sold through traditional livestock markets.

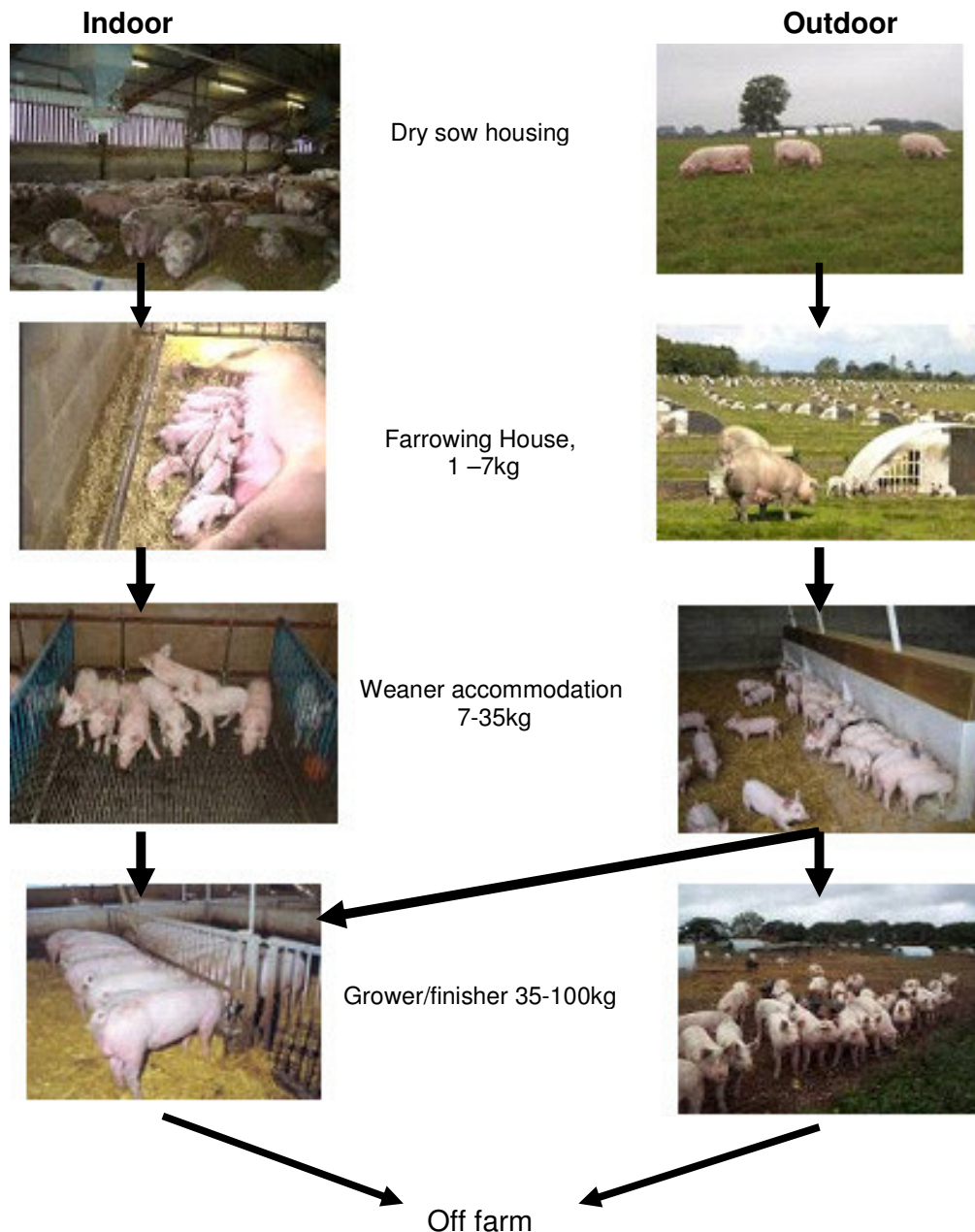


Indoor Production

Breeding pigs are kept on straw and finishing pigs are either kept on straw or on slatted floors. Slatted floors have gaps in them to allow waste to drain away from where the pigs are housed.

Outdoor Production

Keeping pigs outside is not easy in the UK. Extremes of weather present additional challenges to outdoor pig health and welfare. Like dogs, pigs are only able to regulate their body temperature through panting. They also have very sensitive skin. In warm weather it is vital to provide wallows and shade to prevent sunburn and keep cool. During cold and wet weather additional bedding is required to keep warm. As such, different breeds which can cope with living outside are used.



The Environment

The UK pig industry is very environmentally aware and is actively involved both in this and the climate change debate, working closely with government and regulators. With a growing environmental awareness there comes increasing amounts of environmental legislation across the EU for the industry to work within.

The Law

The law in the UK is very strict when it comes to keeping pigs. All animals have to have a licence to move, 'dry sows' must be housed in buildings where their movement is not restricted, growth antibiotics are not allowed to be used in food and the pigs' welfare has to be considered at all times. Slatted buildings do not use straw as a bedding material however each pen is required to include some material such as wood or plastic toys which allow the pigs to display their natural behaviour.

There are also controls on access to water, temperatures, noise levels and light.

All but the Squeek

Unlike cattle and sheep, practically all of the pig can be used for food of some kind (human and pet), leading to the old saying, 'you can use all but the squeak'.

Pork is a low fat meat which provides amino acids and a range of vitamins required for a healthy diet. Consumption of pork has remained relatively stable over recent years, with an increase seen mainly in processed products such as sausages.

Figure 2 shows which part of the carcass are used. Nearly 30% of the carcass will be exported, much of this is product not normally eaten in the UK such as offal.

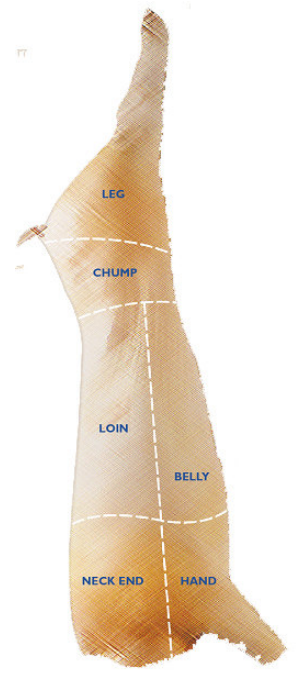


Figure 2. Cuts of pork

Further Information:

www.bpex.org.uk

www.npa-uk.org.uk

www.thepigsite.com

www.lovepork.co.uk

www.mlc.org.uk

www.pigsonline.org.uk/breeds.htm

www.britishpigs.org.uk/breedlist.htm

Outsider's Guide to Animal Production. 1995. Published by Agricola Training Ltd, Ryelands, Stow, Lincoln LN1 2DE. Tel: 01427 788 905. ISBN 0 9525061 0 6.

Outdoor Pig Production by Keith Thornton. 1990. £13.95. Published by Farming Press, Miller Freeman Professional Ltd, Wharfedale Road, Ipswich IP1 4LG. Tel: 01473 241 122. ISBN 0 85236 178 5.

Pig Enterprise (interactive training package). A multimedia training package for the British Pig Industry. Copies available from BPEX tel: Lindsay Tapp on 01908 677577

Thanks

FACE is grateful to Tess Howe of BPEX (the British Pig Executive) for preparing this leaflet.