Producing Pork on a Small Scale

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There is a growing demand for information concerning small-scale pork production. Small, diversified farm owners, weekend farmers and youth are showing interest in alternatives to the large confinement facilities that dominate “modern” production.

Why would anyone want to raise hogs? Some may gain a sense of responsibility and accomplishment from farrowing a sow and raising the pigs to market. Others may simply enjoy observing this intelligent creature and like to keep a hog or two around. A growing number of farmers want to produce a highly nutritious, tasty pork product for their own use or for a specialty market.

With a minimum of investment in facilities, a you can market labor, management, land value, homegrown grains and forages and other assets in the form of market hogs (or feeder pigs). The downfall of many small swine operations has been in trying to substitute borrowed capital for some of these assets. Another is the dependence on a traditional market rather than specialty or niche markets.

Just as with any farming enterprise, the small hog operation must be based on sound economic principles. Budgets, cash flows and markets must guide the establishment or expansion of any hog operation. Realistic price estimates and costs of production are critical when you wager your farm and all your belongings on the hog business.

To be successful, small pork producers must work and think harder than the established, larger operator. Their competitive edge lies in lower fixed costs, the will to find a more economical way of raising hogs and the will to market the final product they are proud of. They must remember to spend a dollar only when it will return more than a dollar in income. Small producers must stick to the basics of pork production. The following worksheet may help in deciding if this is something you want to pursue.

This fact sheet is the first in a series concentrating on production practices for small-scale pork producers. For more information, contact your local county Extension office, or call (334)844-1505.
Worksheet for raising pigs on a small scale

**Section A. General information**

1. A successful pig farmer knows pig management, enjoys working with pigs, is a good manager, enjoys challenges and is willing to learn and use new ideas. Do you excel in three or more of these areas?

2. Have you ever owned or worked with pigs?

3. Raising pigs does not fit a traditional work week. Are you willing to spend evenings, nights, weekends and holidays working with pigs?

**Section B. Land and facilities**

4. One acre of land can accommodate 10 to 50 pigs or 5 to 10 sows, depending on soil type, slope and type of ground cover. Do you own or have access to enough land in permanent pasture for the number of animals you want to raise?

5. Do you have a supply of building materials available for fences and shelters?

6. Are you willing to work with state and federal environmental agencies concerning construction of facilities?

**Section C. Feed**

7. A pig requires about 700 pounds of feed to reach 200 pounds, and over 1000 pounds of feed to reach 300 pounds. This feed will contain 75 to 85 percent grain. Do you grow any grain that you can use for pig feed?

8. Do you have facilities for grain storage?

9. Is there a feed dealer in your area?

10. Do you have some way of mixing different ingredients for pig feed?

**Section D. Labor**

11. Pigs will require some labor every day for feeding, cleaning, treating and repairs. Do you have spare time to spend with pigs every day?

12. Do you have family members willing to provide some of the labor?

13. Do you have employees that can provide some of the labor?

**Section E. Marketing**

14. For any commodity, there must be some place to sell the final product. Is there a market you can sell your pigs through?

15. For freezer pork, is there a processor willing to harvest and process your pigs?

16. Are there several market options for your pigs?
Evaluation

Too often people will begin an enterprise without considering everything required. Your answers to the previous questions will help determine if raising pigs on a small scale is something for you to consider.

Experience is not essential for this enterprise, but answering yes to questions 1 and 3 is.

Raising pigs on a permanent pasture will result in the lowest facility costs and the least implications for environmental regulations. Raising pigs in dirt lots puts the farm under the Alabama AFO/CAFO rule. A supply of materials on hand reduces capital outlay for facilities.

Feed is 60 to 80 percent of the inputs for raising pigs. Having a supply of grain on hand at all times is best. You also need a local feed supplier for other ingredients, or to purchase a complete diet for your pigs. Mixing facilities are required if you plan on using more than two or three ingredients.

Labor is critical for pastured pig production. Some labor is required every day, with more required for repairs and treatment. If you answered no to questions 11, 12, and 13, this is not the project for you. Depending on numbers, answering yes to one or more may be adequate.

Small numbers make marketing through normal channels nearly impossible, but are ideal for niche-type markets. You have to have a market for what you produce, either for the pig or for pork. If you are marketing pork, all food safety rules and regulations must be followed.

Raising pigs on a small scale can be enjoyable and profitable with work, common sense and ingenuity.