

Pork Production Systems and Marketing Methods

PORK PRODUCTION has evolved over the past 50 to 100 years into typically larger production systems with more pigs being produced on fewer farms. Originally, every farmer raised a few pigs for personal consumption and for the production of lard for cooking. Later, pigs were produced on a larger scale and sold on the open market. Today, most pork farms are involved in a sole stage of the production process and raise pigs that are uniform in shape and quality. Marketing methods have changed to fit the new production systems.



(Courtesy, Agricultural Research Service, USDA)

Objective:



Compare and contrast various pork production systems and methods of marketing pigs.

Key Terms:



alternative market production systems
farrow-to-finish production systems
farrow-to-wean production systems
feeder pig production systems
purebred production systems
seedstock production systems
wean-to-finish production systems

Pork Production Systems and Methods of Marketing Pigs

The production systems used by pork producers can be broken down into seven categories. They are (1) farrow to finish, (2) farrow to wean, (3) feeder pig production, (4) wean to finish, (5) seedstock production, (6) purebred production, and (7) alternative market production. Each system is involved in one or more phases of the production process. Also, each has a unique marketing approach because of the variation in the product it is selling. In all, the industry has evolved into an efficient mode of raising pork and has developed new or modified marketing options.

FARROW TO FINISH

Farrow-to-finish production systems involve all phases of pork production. A producer breeds sows on the farm, maintains them through gestation, farrows them, weans the piglets, feeds the pigs to market weight, and sells the pigs. The process then begins anew. This type of production system was the most common for many years. While it still exists, smaller operations of this kind began to fade in the 1980s.

Before the upsizing of pork farms, most producers using the farrow-to-finish production system sold their pigs on the open market. A producer would be paid the current market value for market pigs. This involved much risk because of fluctuation in prices. Today, producers using the farrow-to-finish production system tend to sell their market pigs on contract to area pork processing facilities. This form of marketing involves much less risk because a producer knows in advance what he or she will receive for the market pigs.

FARROW TO WEAN

Farrow-to-wean production systems are a newer development in pork production. These systems came about to supply large feeder operations with weanling pigs. A farrow-to-wean production system involves the breeding, gestation, and farrowing of sows. The piglets remain with their mother sows until weaning at approximately 15 to 20 days of age. Once weaned, the pigs are shipped to a wean-to-finish operation. Typically, the pigs are sold on a yearly contract basis to the finishing operation. Farrow-to-wean production systems do not maintain any pigs to send to market. The pigs are all sold as soon as they are weaned.

FEEDER PIG PRODUCTION

Feeder pig production systems are not as common today as they were in the mid- to late 1900s. These systems involve the breeding, gestation, and farrowing of sows, the weaning of piglets, and the maintaining of the pigs until they reach the 50- to 60-pound range. The pigs are then sold on the open market to producers wanting to feed larger weaned pigs to market

weight. These production systems still exist in some regions but have mostly been replaced by farrow-to-wean or farrow-to-finish production systems.

WEAN TO FINISH

Wean-to-finish production systems are a common means of raising pork today. Producers purchase 15- to 20-day-old pigs and raise them to market weight. The pigs are typically purchased on a contract. Upon reaching market weight, the pigs are sold to an area pork processing facility on a separate contract. More than 50 percent of pigs are purchased and sold on contract to eliminate the risk of fluctuating markets. This also leads to steady supplies of pigs to feeders and of market pigs to processors.



FIGURE 1. Hogs being fed in a wean-to-finish operation. (Courtesy, Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA)

SEEDSTOCK PRODUCTION

Seedstock production systems are a means of supplying replacement females and, in some cases, replacement males to operations that involve the farrowing of sows. Because of the use of artificial insemination, males are not as commonly raised for replacements. Only a few males are needed to breed a large number of females, so fewer are raised for this purpose. The females are bred with specifically selected genetics and are managed very closely to obtain the best possible replacements. Typically the females are maintained at the seedstock production facility until they reach 50 to 75 pounds. They are then marketed to producers wishing to purchase replacement females. They tend to cost significantly more than feeder pigs because of their high management background and improved genetics. Sales between a seedstock producer and a buyer are usually on a private basis and are rarely conducted on the open market.

PUREBRED PRODUCTION

Purebred production systems are on a smaller scale than many other production systems. They typically involve all the aspects of farrow-to-finish production systems except a single breed is used to raise market animals. Purebred production systems also occasionally raise purebred replacement animals. Common breeds found in purebred production systems

include Hampshire, Duroc, and Yorkshire. The largest market for purebred pigs is in the show pig industry. Show pigs are exhibited by breed. Each animal has a pedigree registered with a national organization. Superior show pigs demand premium prices. Success in marketing purebred pigs requires that the animals possess traits desired by other purebred breeders or unique traits desired by seedstock producers.

ALTERNATIVE MARKET PRODUCTION

Alternative market production systems are relatively new, having been developed within the past 10 to 20 years. The methods of production are similar to those of farrow to finish, except for management and marketing techniques. Alternative producers raise pigs to be sold in specialized markets where consumers have specific demands. Included in alternative market production systems may be the raising of antibiotic-free and growth-stimulate-free market animals. Some consumers are willing to pay significant premiums for meat from these types of animals. Another popular type of niche market production involves raising pigs outside and free range for their entire lives. Some consumers like the theory and methods of raising pork similarly to the way it was raised when pigs were first domesticated. Breed organizations, such as the one for the Berkshire breed, have developed registered trademarks for their pork. The meat may contain specialized characteristics desired by some ethnic markets. Although alternative market production systems receive premiums for their pork products, they endure more intense management requirements and must maintain them to keep their market secure. Producers are usually actively involved in the promotion and sales of their products. Sales typically occur directly between producers and consumers.



FIGURE 2. Pigs being raised outside and free range. (Courtesy, Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA)

Summary:



Pork production systems and marketing methods have changed in recent years, often becoming more streamlined. More marketing has been on a contract basis to secure acceptable prices while maintaining a steady supply for processing plants. Because of the streamlining of pork production, alternative markets have also devel-

oped for some producers. Premiums can be achieved through extra efforts in marketing and management.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What are the phases involved in a farrow-to-finish production system?
2. At what age are pigs marketed in a farrow-to-wean production system?
3. What is the largest market for purebred production systems?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Different pork production systems can be found throughout the United States. Identify two or three different production systems and set up field trips to visit them. Ask questions about the management requirements for each production system. Also inquire about how the pigs are marketed—privately or on a contract basis.

Web Links:



National Pork Producers Council

<http://www.nppc.org>

Illini PorkNet

<http://www.triail.uiuc.edu/porknet/>

Niche Pork

<http://www.nichepork.org>

Agricultural Career Profiles

<http://www.mycart.com/career-profiles>