

High Value Pork and Poultry Production and Marketing

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SUGGESTIONS FOR DIRECT MARKETING LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS

1. Identify the product you would like to sell. Decide whether you want to sell the best end of the herd or add value to the ones that you are getting docked on. You need a product that you can believe in.
2. Know your market ahead of time. Be extremely cautious on those products that have no commodity market to fall back on, such as eggs, broilers, or exotics.
3. Identify your niche and differentiate your product. The sky is the limit. There are markets for extremely lean, extremely marbled, smaller than normal cuts, larger than normal cuts, fresher, convenience (cooked products or catering), cost, production system, feeding system, breed, specialty cuts, specialty sausages, etc.
4. Identify your market. Restaurants, individuals, and retailers would be a few examples. All of these require different strategies.
5. Obey all applicable health codes. Some products in certain health districts (especially when selling direct to individuals on the farm) are exempt from federal inspection, such as eggs and broilers. It is best to check with your local sanitarian, state health department, and state or federal meat inspection department. Finding a flexible federally inspected processor will be difficult in most areas. It takes some time for the processor to realize that you are serious about direct marketing. Once they realize you are serious, it's a lot easier to be higher on their priority list.
6. Excellent service is essential to maintaining customers.
7. Charge a price that covers time, processing, equipment, miscellaneous expenses, unsold cuts, etc. Direct marketing does not excuse the need to always control costs on production!
8. A variety of products makes income easier to generate. It costs no more to distribute five different animal products

than it does to distribute one. Distribution costs are where the big guys have the upper hand. Also, it is much easier to sell another product to an existing customer than it is to pick up a new customer.

9. Attempt to get as much free publicity as possible. Network and be involved in activities within your industry.

10. Persistence is key. Marketing is not easy and you never know when you will find your niche. It wouldn't hurt to take some sales and marketing classes. Sales are not a skill that most farmers are comfortable with.

Good luck. You can visit our farm on the internet at the American Farm Land Trust's grassfarming site: (www.grassfarmer.com).

PASTURE FARROWING HINTS

1. Farrow on light ground. The sandier and hillier the better. Trees for shade are a definite plus for warm weather.
2. Select for good mothering genetics. Confinement genetics will need at least 40% culling. Colored breeds tend to work best.
3. Have enough bedded huts for sows to farrow in. Using extra until you understand where they will farrow is definitely recommended.
4. Work with the sow's natural instincts. They want to farrow away from the group. Have a hut anywhere they are going to farrow. They normally start in the corners. They will farrow in the warmest spot in cold weather and the coolest spot in hot weather. They don't like to farrow beside an older litter. They won't farrow in a hut that has had a litter already farrowed in it even if the litter has moved on. Sows require a lot less attention farrowing on pasture. If your lot only has one shady spot expect all the sows to farrow under it if it is hot. That would be a disaster.
5. Keep age in the lot very close. The most important

About Greg Gunthorp

Greg is a fourth-generation family farmer. He raises approximately 1,000-1,200 pastured hogs, 1,000 pastured chickens, and 25 acres of feed corn on a farm close to where he grew up.

He has been very active in the sustainable agriculture movement in the US. He served on the USDA Small Farm Commission, President Clinton's Small Farm Advisory Panel, and is the founder and current president of a local sustainable ag group. Greg is an outspoken small farm and organic agriculture advocate having given presentations on pasture pork production and keynote addresses on sustainable agriculture in at least a dozen states. Greg and his wife Lei have recently

bought into a small federally inspected red meat and poultry processing plant so that he is able to control his products from conception to consumer. Their pork and poultry is currently served at some of the finest restaurants in the Midwest.

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thing to remember when raising pigs farrowed on pasture is that little pigs need colostrum. A sure way to fail is to allow pigs to get old enough to be running around robbing milk from young litters. The age that pigs start moving away from the huts depends a lot on the weather. Never, never farrow in the same lot for more than 14 days! In hot weather you may only be able to get away with two to four days. This is the ideal place for hot-tape electric fences. I'm not sure if there is an upper number per lot that will give you problems. One hundred pigs farrowing in two days will cause a lot fewer problems than five that take one month to farrow in the same lot. I don't let groups of sows and pigs together until the little pigs are eating creep feed.

6. Keep huts bedded well enough to stay dry. This takes a lot of bedding in damp rainy weather and hardly any in hot dry summer. One to 15 square bales of straw per hut from birth to six to eight weeks weaning is possible depending on weather. I start with a half a bale of straw before farrowing in nice weather. Don't cheat on straw!

7. Use a nice hut -- something that is rain-tight and not drafty. Sides either need to be sloped well or need guards to protect pigs. Of course the choice of hut depends on the time of year you intend to farrow. I know of people in the Deep South farrowing Tamworth sows without huts. I also know of guys in Michigan farrowing hogs year around. It takes a very nice hut and a lot of bedding to raise pigs without supplemental heat. They will survive in the coldest weather if they have a dry, draft-free hut. With enough straw they can get completely covered up.

8. Farrow seasonally. Once a year would be an excellent addition to a crop farm. My pigs that are farrowed in late April make about the right size to hog down corn. If you were going to farrow only once a year you could move that back to late May.

9. Farrow on pasture. Bare dirt is either mud or dust. Dust and mud don't make very healthy environments for animals. Self feed the sows for lower labor requirements especially if they have big litters. A good legume pasture will save a lot on the feed bill.

PASTURE HOG HINTS

1. Keep costs low. Spend money on only necessary things.
2. Don't cut corners on sow feed. The number of pigs I sell per litter is over 90 percent of the pigs born alive. If they don't have decent litters you can't sell large litters.
3. Don't cheat on minerals. Hogs on pasture have a lower mineral requirement than confinement hogs, but they still need minerals.
4. Have plenty of high quality legume pasture. Frost seed clovers and alfalfas every year if you have to. Pigs love clover, alfalfa, chicory, rape, turnips, and short vegetative grass. Pigs aren't ruminants. They won't bloat on

pure stands of alfalfa or clover. Pigs won't gain on pasture without grain. Sows can maintain weight on a very high quality legume pasture without grain. Genetics differ greatly in their ability to utilize forages and fiber. Colored breeds are much better.

5. Select gilts for breeding stock that thrived under pasture finishing.

6. Keep management level of the sows and gilts very high. Gilts should be less than seven months old when selected. They shouldn't farrow at less than one year old. They should weigh around 300 pounds when bred - 400 pounds at farrowing. If you are purchasing replacement gilts don't try to replace grain with pasture immediately. Pigs need time to adapt to a high-fiber diet. Monitor condition of gilts closely. Farrowing small gilts is asking for trouble. Don't try breeding them at lightweight and getting them to gain enough to weigh four hundred pounds at farrowing. Your own replacement gilts fed a high forage diet from birth will give you much less problems for two reasons: First, you have selected gilts that gained well on a high-fiber diet in a pasture environment; second, you are selecting them from genetics that are farrowing on pasture successfully. The best source of replacements is from your older sows that have farrowed successfully for years on pasture. Mothering ability is heritable.

7. Keep fiber in your sow's diet year around. It will increase litter size. The cheapest source is pasture. Hay in the winter is advised.

8. I vaccinate for reproductive diseases. I vaccinate for Parvo/Lepto/Erysipilis and PRRS. I have to catch them at weaning anyway. Giving the shot while I have them caught to ring isn't a lot of work. It costs about \$3 per sow per year. I live too close to other pigs to risk not vaccinating them. I think a lot could be done on selecting resistant genetics. I don't vaccinate little pigs. I don't give them any shots. I don't clip teeth. I don't give iron shots. My death loss is non-existent. Shots wouldn't pay!

9. Castrate the little pigs at one-day-old. The sow is still slow from labor. The little pigs can run pretty fast after they are 24 hours old. The mother isn't very cooperative by then either!

10. Use all available technology that is cost effective to lower your labor requirements. Some of this technology includes black plastic pipe, high tensile fence, and low-impedance fence chargers, energy free waterers (Mirafont types), four wheelers, and round bales of straw.

11. Sort pigs off pasture by shutting them in their coops while they are sleeping. It saves a lot of time not having to chase them into a pen!

12. Utilize all farm resources: Land, labor and capital. Don't forget to use the sows to glean cornfields. Farrow in off-season from crop requirements.