

Guide to Raising **PIGS**



COUNTRYSIDE
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Using Everything But The Squeal

Don't make the mistake of thinking pigs produce only chops, bacon and ham. When you raise your own, you'll get many other products you might not consider purchasing at the meat counter. Ignoring or wasting them increases the price of your homegrown pork...and deprives you of some homestead treats and experiences.

Thrifty rural residents are renowned for using "everything but the squeal" on a pig. Meat scraps are routinely used for sausage. Lard becomes soap, and the best of it, the leaf lard, is used in cooking. Some homestead bakers will use nothing else, especially for pies.

The tail, with a bit of skin and fat attached, is kept on the stove as an easy way to grease pans. Smoked pork hocks and pickled pigs feet are delicacies.

But what can be done with the head?

At least one Countrysider skins it, simmers it, and uses the meat in tamales. The other popular usage is in head cheese.

Here is a head cheese recipe from Kathy and Bob Kellogg, authors of *Raising Pigs Successfully*.

Split the head into halves with a meat saw. Remove the eyes and clean the ears and nostrils. Rub the head halves with coarse salt and pack loosely into a large kettle. Leave for two days in a cool place or refrigerate.

Wash the salted head in cold water and return to the kettle. Add the tongue, heart and some lean trimmings if desired. Cover the meat with water and simmer until well done and the meat will separate easily from the bones (about three hours).

Remove the meat from the broth. Remove all the meat from the bones and cut it up finely. Discard the bones. Return the meat to the broth in the pan. Add seasonings as desired and simmer 15 to 20 minutes, skimming off as much fat as possible and stirring occasionally.

Pour into loaf pans or molds and chill. Head cheese can be eaten cold as sandwich meat or fried like scrap-ple.

Don't forget the tongue!

Try this recipe from *Raising the Homestead Hog*.

Place a tongue, two medium-sized onions, a carrot, several ribs of celery and some parsley in a kettle. Barely cover with boiling water and add a teaspoon of salt and eight peppercorns. Simmer until tender (about three hours). Drain the tongue, skin it, and serve. This is good with a mustard or horseradish sauce.

Or, if you take the recipe a step further and slice it and bake it in a sauce, your family won't even know what they're eating. For this sauce, melt 2-1/2 tablespoons of butter. In it, brown 2 slices of onion, a chopped green pepper, and a sliced garlic clove. Stir in 2 teaspoons of salt, 2-1/2 cups of tomatoes, 1/2 bay leaf, 8 peppercorns, 1/2 teaspoon paprika and 1 tablespoon of brown sugar. (You can also add chopped olives or mushrooms, slivered almonds, or just about anything from the homestead garden.)

Place the drained, sliced tongue in a casserole, pour the sauce over it, and bake at 375°F for a half hour. Taste this just once, and if you don't already appreciate such meats, you'll experience an awakening.

Raising The HOMESTEAD HOG

For a genuine, homestead-produced bacon-lettuce-tomato sandwich, first you must get a pig

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Why raise pigs on the homestead? After all, pork is at its lowest price in decades, and whole hogs can be purchased cheaply. Some farmers are giving their hogs away to food pantries rather than selling them for pennies a pound. Wouldn't it just be easier to buy a bargain-priced barrow (castrated male) or cull hog and send it to the butcher?

Ironically, this could also be the best time to get a start on a homestead pig project. With hog prices at dirt-cheap levels, piglets and young animals can be obtained for modest sums. Since it's a buyer's market, you can be picky about obtaining good stock and still pay a reasonable price.

Often referred to as the "mortgage lifter" in the past, anyone raising hogs commercially in today's depressed market will have nothing but red ink to show for their efforts. However, markets do fluctuate, and this is an excellent time to gain the experience and know-how that may help you turn a profit when prices recover.

Most importantly, you'll be raising your own high-quality meat. Like other home-raised food products, meat from a homestead hog is far superior in texture and flavor to the stuff wrapped in cellophane in the meat section of the local grocer. If sausage making interests you, the numerous odd pieces and scraps from a hog will provide plenty of raw material for new recipes and experimenting.

The Modern Homestead Pig

Dig through the musty stacks at the library or find an old farm book and look at the photos of the blimp-shaped animals with stumpy legs. Those bulky beasts are Poland-China, Chester White and Duroc-Jersey pigs that were raised for both meat and lard.



From the Belanger family album:
John, in 1976.

A generation or two ago, lard was much more popular than it is today, and a pig that could produce large quantities of leaf lard (the pure white fat from near the kidneys) along with meat was highly prized. With today's widespread use of vegetable oils, lard consumption is much lower, and it is more of a byproduct of hog production. Even the traditionally "chuffy" or heavy breeds tend to be smaller and leaner than they were in the past.

Some of today's better-known hog breeds include the distinctive-looking Hampshire, which is black with a white "belt" near the front legs; the mostly black Berkshire, which is known for lean carcasses; and the droopy-eared Black Poland, which has a reputation for hardiness and a color pattern that is similar to the Berkshire. Spotted pigs have a wide variety of color patterns. This droopy-eared breed is sometimes chosen for its hardiness and lengthy carcass.

White or light-colored pigs are fairly common, and there are several popular breeds. Because of their tendency to produce large litters, Yorkshires are sometimes referred to as the "mother breed." Like other breeds that end in "shire," the Yorkshire is of English origin and is known for rapid growth.

The droopy-eared Landrace is commonly found in indoor/confinement breeding arrangements. This long-bodied breed is known for its mellow temperament. The aforementioned Chester White is known as a good breeder and mother, and they are a popular choice for crossbreeding. The Chester White is named after Chester County, Pennsylvania, its place of origin.

Aside from personal preference for a certain color or pattern, is there any reason to choose dark or light-colored swine?

Conventional wisdom suggests that darker hogs should be raised in colder climates, while light-colored or white pigs are the better choice in warmer areas. While this may be true, keep in mind that pigs of any color don't fare well in very hot conditions. We'll have more on this topic in the housing section.

Homesteaders as well as commercial producers generally seek pigs that will grow quickly to a meaty size with a high proportion of lean to fat. While a full-grown pig can weigh upwards of 600 pounds, the vast majority of pigs are butchered when they reach 200 to 250 pounds. An eight-week-old weaned piglet in the 35- to 40-pound range purchased in the spring can easily reach prime weight by fall, the traditional time for hog butchering.

Which breed should you choose? The vast majority of meat animals are crossbreeds, and this is almost certainly what you'll get if you purchase a few piglets from a local farmer or stock auction.

For all practical purposes, the specific breeds that are crossed for a litter of piglets are less important than the quality of the individual animals involved. A prime boar and sow from what might be considered "inferior" breeds will produce better stock than two mediocre specimens from allegedly "superior" breeds.

The differences in various pig breeds can be much smaller than in other animals. A University of Wisconsin study of nine pig breeds showed that the dressing percentage (the amount of meat obtained from a carcass) had a very narrow range.

The relatively rare Tamworth brought up the rear with a 70.8 percent dressing rate, while the Chester White's first-place ranking of 72.9 percent was just over two percent higher. On a 220-pound young pig, the difference between those breeds is less than five pounds. Take an above-average Tamworth and an ordinary Chester White, and that margin will be even smaller.

In pig raising, management of the homestead animal is the most important consideration. The farmer who feeds his hogs a balanced diet, provides adequate housing and is attentive to their needs will reap the benefits of his efforts. With that said, raising swine is not a rigid, lockstep type of enterprise. Pigs can be tended in an endless variety of ways. Once you get involved, you'll probably come up with some methods that are especially well suited for your unique situation.

Finding Good Stock

When two purebred pigs or a purebred and crossbreed are mated, the offspring pick up the positive traits of the parents, but they don't carry over to the succeeding generation. With that in mind, what should you look for when shopping for crossbreeds? How can the novice find decent stock for the homestead?

Young animals should be energetic and active, with clear eyes and a healthy pink skin. Pass if a young pig has respiratory problems, coughs, wheezes or has swollen leg joints or other obvious flaws. When in doubt, wait for a better specimen.

Size is an important factor. Look for the biggest and healthiest piglets from the litter. It's human nature to pull for the runt of the bunch, but it doesn't work when choosing an animal for meat rather than as a pet. Runts usually stay that way, and you'll end up paying the price in less meat for the table along with more frequent health problems.

One Canadian COUNTRYSIDE reader offered an unusual cure and supplement for runts. She feeds them a teaspoon of nutmeg once a day for four days. She claims it works, and it certainly wouldn't cost much to try this non-pharmaceutical remedy.

Sometimes described as "sociable," pigs enjoy the company of a fellow porker. Another mouth at the feed trough also provides the pig with competition for food and an incentive to eat and put on weight faster.

While there is the additional cost of feeding another pig, other chores such as watering and fencing will require the same amount of effort whether you're raising a solo animal or a pair. If two pigs will provide you with more meat than needed, it's hardly difficult to distribute the excess.

One former city dweller sells his excess pork to urban friends. Even with the cost of processing, they pay a little less than grocery store prices for factory farm pork and get organically raised meat at an big discount. The homesteader clears a profit, and everyone is happy with the arrangement. Surplus hams, chops and bacon also make excellent gifts, and the cost to the giver is a fraction of what similar "gourmet" quality products would cost.

What about livestock auctions? They are definitely more of a risk for the first-time buyer or anyone with limited experience. You won't be able to check out the piglets and their parents in familiar surroundings. Being transported from mama to a strange place will stress young pigs, and they could be exposed to sick animals.

This doesn't mean that you can't get decent stock for a fair price at an auction, but going to a local farm with a reputation for quality stock might be the wiser route for the newcomer. If the idea of buying at auction appeals to you, it could pay to bring along a more experienced advisor.

Should you choose barrows or gilts when buying pigs? The barrows put on weight a little faster, while gilts are slightly leaner. Since the pigs will be butchered before they reach breeding age, it's not a major issue. Stick with the animals that have the most potential for a meaty carcass.

Hopefully, you've done some homework before buying those first piglets. That means attending county fairs, livestock sales, farms, auction barns and other places where you can observe pigs first-hand and get some basic knowledge of the species.

Part of your education should include visits to a homestead type of pig setup rather than a factory farm that raises hundreds of hogs. The contacts and knowledge that can be gained from a small-scale operation will be of much greater value than learning the procedures of a corporate enterprise.

Fencing And Housing

This is one area where planning and working ahead will pay big dividends. The time to put together a decent shelter is well before the pigs are brought home. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen.

When it comes to fencing, swine offer a unique challenge to the homesteader. Wiring and posts must be sturdy enough to withstand challenges from a 200-pound plus porker, but it must be low and fine enough to prevent a 35-pound weaner from slipping out. Since pigs of all sizes are burrowers, this must also be taken into account when putting together fences and gates. When designing a system, imagine a 250-pound beast scratching its back on a post (hogs love being scratched) or just pushing on a fence to see if it will hold up.

Choices include woven wire, barbed wire, wooden gates and barriers, electric fencing, sturdy metal hog panels or any combination of the above. Farm author and veteran pig breeder Kelly Klober recommends a single strand of charged wire four inches off the ground to contain small pigs. If your animals are more than 80 pounds, an electrified strand a foot off the ground will suffice.

Rolls of woven wire (commonly known as hog wire) comes in heights of 26 and 34 inches. Combining this with the single-strand electric fence, on the pig side, provides additional protection.

When it comes to fence posts, Klober places rock-solid durability at a premium.

"A Missouri fencing trademark was and is eight-foot-long crossties set three feet into a concrete footing for corner posts," he wrote. "Double-bracing corner posts with treated poles or timbers will further strengthen their holding power. There is also now a system that makes it possible to double-brace seven-foot-long steel posts with other steel posts and use them for solidly anchored fence corners."

Line posts don't need to be as stout as corner posts, but they should be tough enough to withstand battering. They are set up at 10 to 15-foot intervals. Posts can be set farther apart in long, straight stretches, and the number will have to be increased in rolling terrain or other uneven areas.

For an electrified fence, you'll need a charger, which is a small transformer. The unit has to be protected from the elements, so if it's not in the barn, you'll have to place it in a waterproof box or a similar container. Chargers can be run by regular electric current, solar power or batteries.

Klober recommends a minimum of 250 square feet per pig in a fenced drylot. If the area is flat or has more moisture than normal, the plot will have to be increased accordingly to provide adequate drainage and to prevent the hogs from rooting up the entire area. Odd little bits of land and hilly parcels are good places for a drylot.

In his book *A Guide to Raising Pigs*, Klober noted that he maintains a 10- to 20-foot strip of sod at the bottom of each of his drylots. This filters runoff from the hog pens and prevents erosion. If excessive rooting and digging become a problem, then it might be time to ring your pigs.

A specialized tool is needed to place a soft metal ring on the pig's nose. This will cause the hog to feel some pain when digging with his snout and serves as a strong deterrent. Outdoor drylots will need to be rotated every year or two to break up the life cycles of diseases and parasites. The plot can be tilled to repair digging damage, or it can be left alone to grow grass and native plants.



Hog shelters need not be elaborate. With one like this (which can also be used for other livestock), close attention should be paid to enclosing the straw bale walls in fencing or hog panels to protect them from the animals.

Hog panels and simple wood fences (some thrifty folks use recycled pallets) are well suited for making gates and portable fences. More on this topic when we get to the pastured pig.

In many cases, a suitable shelter is already available. It could be an old hog pen, barn, shed, chicken coop or other existing structure that would be adequate for housing one to three pigs. The old building might need some minor repairs, cleaning or stronger fencing, but it will get the job done.

If you're starting from scratch, be selective when picking a location for a hog pen, as just any old vacant spot won't do. When possible, it should be close to where you'll store the pig food. Water should also be within easy distance.

Pigs have a reputation for defecating in one spot, and that is true to a point. The animal won't soil his sleeping quarters, but most anything else is fair game.

In his experience, Jd Belanger, former *COUNTRYSIDE* editor and author of *Raising the Homestead Hog* (Rodale Press, 1977), notes that pigs routinely move 10 to 12 feet from their favorite spot to defecate. If the animal is in a square enclosure, that means he could leave manure just about anywhere. In a narrower or more rectangular pen, the pig will gravitate to one spot, and it will make manure removal that much easier.

Since pigs don't fare well in summer heat, this will also need to be considered when setting up a pen. Some kind of shade or shelter from the sun should be provided. When possible, a spot that doesn't have a southern exposure should be considered. One farm author suggested housing hogs in a spot that duplicates a shady forest as much as possible. He reasoned that since wild pigs prefer such an environment, their domestic cousins would do the same.

Since fencing and housing can be as high as 20 percent of the cost of production, savings in this area can really pay off in the long run. For a hog or two, the simple A-frame shelter is a popular choice.

"We did a little A-frame for our pigs," reports one Wisconsin homesteader. "All it took was some 2x4x8s, some roofing and a few other materials. A shelter can be made for under \$30, especially if you use pallets." The A-frame is especially well suited for portable housing.

You can get more elaborate and still have a shelter that is light and transportable. A simple-to-construct shelter can include doors, removable panels for ventilation and a covered feeding area. Plan on at least six feet of space per pig when building a shelter. This guideline is often violated by factory pig farms, but it shouldn't be much of a problem for the homesteader.

Feeding

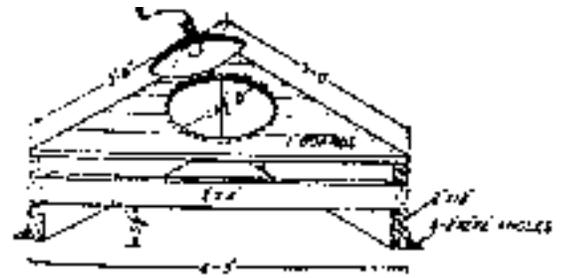
This is one area where pigs and homesteading are an ideal match. Even the moderately successful gardener or dairyman goes through times when garden produce and goat or cow milk is in abundant supply – so abundant that much of the bounty goes to waste.

Instead of tossing those surplus zucchinis, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers and other vegetables onto the compost pile, why not use them to supplement the pig's diet? The excess can be used to put pork on your table, and the manure byproduct goes on your crops for future harvests. It's an ideal setup for the homestead.

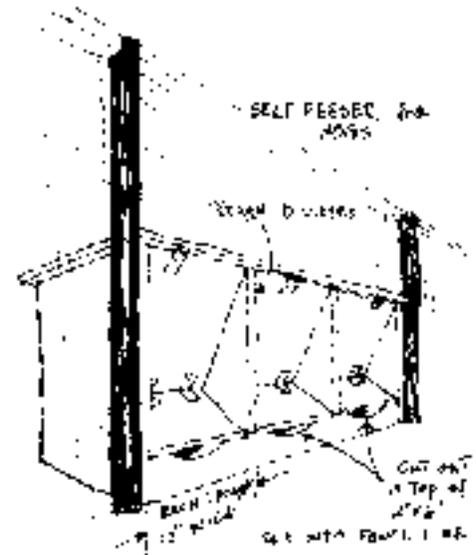
Pigs have a single stomach that has some similarities to a human stomach. Like people, they are capable of eating and enjoying a wide range of plant and animal products.

Hogs will consume a staggering variety of leftovers and waste items and convert them into chops and ham. One trout farmer raises a few pigs on the side. Rather than discarding the large quantity of fish heads that he processes, those trout leftovers are fed to the pigs.

The porkers eagerly gobble up these treats along with anything else they deem edible. To prevent any fishy flavor in the finished product, the trout farmer puts his hogs on a grain-only diet six weeks prior to slaughtering. In addition to paring his feed bill considerably, this frugal farmer also keeps his garbage bill and burden on local landfills to a minimum.



A simple brooder for baby pigs.



Pumpkins were a favorite hog feed a century ago, and they are still a good choice for the organic hog farmer. Early 20th century veterinarian Dr. V.H. Baker strongly recommended a blend of pumpkin and grain cooked together as a nutritious pig feed.

With an eye to the future, Baker saw the trend that has culminated in factory farming and concrete-floored confinement housing for large numbers of pigs. In objecting to such practices, Baker sounded much like a modern organic homesteader.

He wrote, "I believe the purely artificial breeding and feeding of breeding stock, the indiscriminate ringing, the absence of roots and the feeding of breeding animals almost exclusively on corn, have, in many cases, so enfeebled the constitution of swine that they have become an easy prey to the various epidemics and contagious diseases that, of late years, have carried off so many. And I believe, also, that the utmost care will be necessary in the future to guard against this disability."

Baker declared, "Our methods of feeding, together with a greater variety of food material, is conducive to the health of the animal."

Homestead dairy items, especially "byproducts" such as skim milk and whey, should be fed to pigs whenever possible. Perhaps the most enthusiastic endorsement of this practice came from Jd Belanger in his book *Raising the Homestead Hog*.

He wrote, "The hog will make excellent use of what would otherwise be waste. And do pigs love it! They'll learn to recognize you coming with the bucket, and they'll get so excited that they'll make those 'come-and-get-it' dogs in the tv dog food commercials look about as eager as mice coming to a baited trap."

Belanger added, "On the homestead, milk and milk byproducts are the most valuable feeds available. Nutritionists tell us that a pig can thrive on corn and about a gallon of skimmed milk a day, so if we add comfrey and some of the other items we've covered, how can we lose?"

"Once again, the best is yet to come, for we run into another unidentified factor! Milk and milk byproducts hold in check some of the internal parasites of swine. This has been observed, and has also been backed up by research. But even scientists don't know why or how. That doesn't really matter to homesteaders who feed milk to eliminate the need for tankage and fish meal and get an 'organic vermifuge' in the bargain.

"Skim milk is higher in protein than whole milk and has about twice the protein of whey... Skim milk is the best possible source of protein for swine, especially young swine. A young hog should get about a gallon to a gallon-and-one-half of milk per day. While this amount will be a smaller part of the ration as the pig grows and eats more, protein needs also decrease then."

Whey can also be a real asset to the small producer. According to researchers at the University of Wisconsin, feeding fresh, sweet whey to pigs cuts feeding expenses significantly while maintaining carcass quality. In addition to the byproduct of your own cheesemaking, cheese factories are the best source for whey. Only sweet, fresh whey should be fed to hogs.

Pigs readily consume whey, and it reduces their corn consumption as well as the need for soybean meal supplements. Since whey is about 93 percent water, no other liquid should be offered when whey is served. Since whey corrodes metal and concrete, it must be fed in wood, plastic or stainless steel containers. Once again, pigs can take a so-called "waste" product and make good use of it, which is a classic example of the homestead philosophy at work.

Comfrey is another pig food that gets high marks from Belanger. He suggests regular feedings of plants and leaves from this perennial.

"I consider it an ideal homestead plant, for reasons the USDA would never consider," he said. "Comfrey is easily grown on a small scale, much more easily than alfalfa or clover. The best way to harvest it is with a butcher knife or machete, a system I still use for a hundred hogs and more. You can get a crop the first year... It's a very attractive plant and can well be grown in borders and flower beds."

Often touted as a potent herbal remedy and healing agent, comfrey has a unique distinction.

Belanger wrote, "Scientists already know that with the addition of vitamin B₁₂, the protein levels of swine rations can be reduced appreciably. In addition, most of the antibiotic supplements for swine contain not only antibiotics, but also vitamin B₁₂. Now get this: comfrey is the only land plant that contains vitamin B₁₂.

"This vitamin is one of the most recently discovered and is commonly supplied in tankage, meat scraps, fish meal and fish solubles. It is of benefit to humans and other animals afflicted with pernicious anemia. Its relationship to protein needs is interesting to homesteaders, as is its entire background as one of the 'unidentified factors' in nutrition until quite recently."

Even though this prolific plant grows as high as five feet, larger cuttings are too coarse for pig feed, and the nutritional value drops once the plant blossoms. Cutting comfrey at one to two feet is ideal.

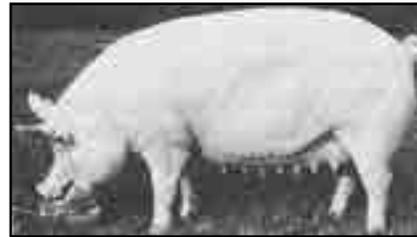
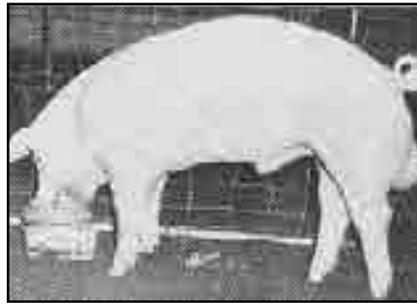
Comfrey grows with minimal attention, and it will produce heavily in almost any climate. Most importantly, pigs will eagerly gobble this nutritious plant down.

"I don't claim to be a nutritionist. I don't know why comfrey is good hog feed," Belanger wrote in *Raising the Homestead Hog*. "All I know is that my pigs of all ages love it, and the young ones especially sicken up like fat little pork sausages when they get their daily ration of comfrey."

"The homesteader can add to that the ease of growing it (compared with alfalfa and clover); the low cost in terms of time, equipment, cash and longevity of stand; and particularly the ease of harvesting and feeding. Especially if you decide not to purchase antibiotic-vitamin B₁₂ supplements, comfrey just makes a lot of sense."

Pigs will eat items such as citrus peels and other "trash" not consumed by humans. What about the tales that pigs eat garbage as part of their diet? There is some truth to that, but here's the rest of the story.

First, much of the so-called "garbage" includes scraps, leftovers, imperfectly prepared foods and various edible items cooked by restaurants, hospitals and other large-scale food service providers. These products were originally intended for human consumption. By law, this garbage must be heated at 212°F (100°C) for 30 minutes to kill any traces of the *Trichinella spiralis* parasite, which manifests itself as the deadly trichinosis infection in humans and is spread by undercooked pork. The soupy product is then fed to pigs, who convert something that might have ended up in an overflowing landfill to high-quality meat.



This boar and sow (left) and gilt (below) are Chester Whites. A gilt is a young female. Note the differences in conformation. Most butcher hogs are either gilts, or barrows—castrated males.



Even though hogs have fattened successfully on diets that included everything from leftovers to old baked goods scrounged from dumpsters, keep in mind that grain should play an important role in feeding.

Regardless of what kind of grain is used as hog feed, it will need to be ground to ensure better and more complete digestion by the swine. While corn is by far the most popular grain, Belanger picked barley as a good option when corn is unavailable.

Although it has more fiber and bulk than corn, barley has slightly more protein along with less amino acid balance. Oats score well in the protein department, but its fiber content is too high to be used as a finishing ration. This grain is a good choice for lactating sows and breeding stock. Oats should make up no more than 30 percent of the diet of feeder pigs.

While wheat is equal to or even superior to corn as a feed grain, it does cost more, and corn is easier to grow and harvest for the homesteader. Outside the corn belt, grain sorghums are often grown in semi-arid areas as pig feed. They are an acceptable choice, as sorghum is comparable to corn in nutritional value. Hogs don't find rye as palatable as other grains, so limit it to 20 percent of a ration.

While thriftiness is important, it can be taken to extremes. Don't feed your hogs scabby (diseased) barley or ergot-infested rye, as health problems ranging from depressed growth rates to abortions and even death may occur.

Depending on the age and nutritional needs of your pigs, grains will need to be blended with other products such as alfalfa hay or soybean oil meal. Eight-week-old weaners need a 17 or 18 percent protein feed, which can be purchased in pelleted form from a feed store. Once the animal reaches 12 weeks, something in the 13 to 15 percent protein range is best.

If you're considering soy products as part of your pig's diet, don't use raw soybeans for feed! They cause soft pork, since uncooked soybeans contain a trypsin inhibitor, or the antitrypsin factor. Trypsin is an enzyme in the pancreatic juice that helps absorb protein. The antitrypsin factor is eliminated by cooking, which makes 44 percent protein soybean oil meal the product of choice for the homestead hog.

While buying grain in bulk or growing your own corn and grinding and mixing rations is the least expensive way to feed a pig, there is something to be said for bags of pre-mixed pellet feed. Small producers may not be able to make the minimum purchases necessary to save money on bulk grain. With self feeders, several days' worth of hog pellets can be added in just a few minutes.

You'll need to store feed in rodent-proof containers. Metal or sturdy plastic garbage cans along with 55-gallon drums (which will hold 350 pounds of feed) are sufficient for meeting the feed requirements of a pair of pigs.

One final caveat on commercial feeds: Many pig rations now contain low-dosage antibiotics and other drugs. While this may not be a major issue to some homesteaders, others who are dedicated to fully organic production will need to make sure that the feed they buy meets their standards.

While pellets in an automatic feeder must be kept dry, food placed in a hog trough can be mixed with water, milk or whey if desired. Will your hogs prefer their rations in this manner, and is it worth the extra effort to you? It's one of those things that will be determined on an individual basis.

Some producers allow their pigs to eat as much as they want (this is known as "free choice" or "full feeding"), while others limit food to 90 percent of their appetite. Once a pig reaches 75 pounds, he will consume one pound of feed for every 25 to 30 pounds of body weight each day. Weaners will need more food in relation to their body weight than older pigs, and they require a higher protein content than the regular mix.

The 90 percent method is suitable for the person who wants a low-fat carcass. It will take a little longer to get a hog to butchering weight this way, but it is an option for those who prefer leaner cuts. It also requires a more hands-on approach, as extra feed will have to be removed within 20 to 30 minutes after feeding time.

Be very diligent when it comes to maintaining an adequate supply of water. A growing pig can consume as much as seven gallons on a hot day. Water can be stored in troughs, salvaged materials such as old washtubs and tanks, or in fountain-style drinkers that can be attached to 55-gallon drums.

Hogs will tip a trough or tub over on a hot day as they attempt to climb in and wallow in the cool water. Klobber welds iron bars across the tops of his troughs to prevent his hogs from jumping in.

Water is vital not only for the health of the pig, but also for the efficiency of your homestead hog operation.

From the weaner stage to butchering at seven or eight months, a pig converts feed to meat at a ratio of roughly 3.2 to 1. When temperatures rise above 80° F, that ratio drops dramatically, and pigs burn up calories just to stay alive rather than fattening up hams and loins.

Be extra diligent about providing a generous supply of water in hot conditions. If the heat is intense, it might pay to extend a garden hose to the hog pen and create a wallow as the water mists the enclosure. Make sure the wallow is in the sunny part of the pen.

The Pastured Pig

Even more than money, time is the one asset that is always in short supply for the active homesteader. That means working smarter instead of working harder should be the goal of the small farmer, and one way to do this is to let your pigs feed themselves.

Sound ridiculous? For at least part of the year, movable fencing will allow you to place animals where there is surplus food. One example would be a harvested potato field or a patch of Jerusalem artichokes, turnips, rutabagas or another root plant.



If there's food around, the pigs will find it and dig it out. In addition to using produce that would otherwise go to waste, the pigs will do a magnificent job of tilling and fertilizing the soil without fossil fuels or chemicals as they root around.

Pigs can also be placed in standing grain fields after they have ripened and are starting to turn brown. They'll clean up the grain with great efficiency and provide tilling and fertilizer without any effort on your part. This "old-fashioned" method is scorned by the corporate farm types, but it always generates interest among homesteaders.

Pigs will graze on alfalfa and other forage crops. While hay alone won't provide a pig with all of his dietary needs (you'll need to supplement with grain), it does lighten your workload and expenses. Most importantly, it also means a healthier pig.

According to Belanger, pigs need more than 30 vitamins and minerals for optimal health. How can you provide such a complex mix without an advanced degree in chemistry? Let the pig do the work!

All of that rooting, digging and foraging in the dirt provides pigs with many of the elements they need. Even those who raise pigs indoors in confinement settings recognize this to some degree. Sick pigs are often given a chunk of fresh sod, some dirt and even a little time in the sun. In many cases, this drug-free cure does the trick.

While the “tiller pig” concept is usually thought to be a summer and fall technique, it can also be employed in the spring. Done properly, it may save you the cost of renting or buying and maintaining a rototiller, according to one low-budget but creative homesteader.

“Get the pigs in the spring a month before you plant the garden,” he advised. “We start our pigs in portable pens around wherever our garden area will be. We supply them with oats and table scraps. The garden is all dug up and fertilized, and they also dig up rocks.”

Health Care

One of the first procedures done on newborn pigs is to trim the two wolf teeth—more commonly known as needle teeth—so the nursing piglet doesn’t damage his mother’s teats. These choppers are found on each side of the upper jaw. The young animals are also given iron shots somewhere between three to five days after birth to build up depleted reserves of the mineral. If this is ignored, anemia may follow.

Worming medication may be given to piglets. Klobner recommends an injection of Ivomec, but worming medicine is also available in treated feed or can be added to drinking water. Male piglets who won’t be kept for breeding stock should be castrated at four to seven days of age. While many raisers wait until pigs are at least five weeks old to do this job, it’s easier on the swine when the procedure is performed earlier.

While pigs were described as “super-hardy animals” by one enthusiastic small farmer, they do require some care and attention, especially if your goal is organic production. Starting out with quality stock will do more to promote good health than a boxful of medicines.

Assuming that your homestead hog will be on grass and soil rather than concrete, the next important step in controlling worm and parasite infestation is regular rotation of fenced lots and pastures. One year (or less) in a given area followed by a year off will do much to break up parasite life cycles.

The pig louse and mange mite are spread by pig-to-pig contact. Pig lice suck blood from their hosts, and this can lead to anemia. Mites tend to congregate in the head and ears, and they often cause obvious skin irritations. External sprays and liquids are recommended to eliminate these pests, but they can’t be applied shortly before farrowing (giving birth) or butchering.

Prompt and regular manure removal will go a long way towards fending off worm infestations. For example, if worm eggs show up in the pig’s feces, the shovel and a trip to the manure pile will eliminate that problem. When the manure is left to sit around, the pests will have an excellent opportunity to infect your pigs.

Belanger succinctly drove home the importance of pasture rotation and diligent manure control in *Raising the Homestead Hog*.

“Another worm with a slightly different life cycle is of interest to homesteaders,” he wrote. “That’s the lungworm. Swine first acquire it by eating infested earthworms. How do the earthworms get infested? By feeding on swine manure that is infested with the eggs of the lungworm that lives in the swine. The cycle, again. This cycle demonstrates the need for pasture rotation.”

He concluded, “For at least part of the cycle, parasites can exist only in the bodies of their hosts. That means they start, and end, with the pigs. Buying clean stock cannot be overemphasized. Your chances for raising worm-free pigs are greatly enhanced if the premises of the seller indicate that sanitation is an important part of his management.” And yours, as well.

Diseases

Anthrax kills by suffocation and blood poisoning. Infected pigs usually have swollen throats, high temperatures, and pass blood-stained feces. Anthrax bacillus can survive in the spore stage for years, and it also afflicts humans.

Did you pass on a weaner who was sneezing? It may have been an early sign of atrophic rhinitis. Infected swine have a wrinkling, thickening and bulging of the snout. At eight to 16 weeks, the snout may twist hideously to one side. Death is usually due to pneumonia.

Rhinitis may be tied to a calcium-phosphorus imbalance or deficiency. Affected pigs can be put on a creep feed that contains 100 grams of sulfamethazine per ton of feed.

Also known as infectious abortion, the greatest danger of brucellosis is that it can be passed onto humans as undulant fever. Other forms of this disease also show up in cattle and goats. It is passed by contact with infected animals or contaminated feed and water. Swine that are found to be infected are destroyed.

Highly contagious hog cholera destroyed numerous herds earlier this century, but it is much rarer today. The symptoms include fever, loss of appetite, weakness, purplish coloring on the underside, coughing, eye discharges, chilling, constipation and diarrhea. Diagnosis can be difficult, because some pigs die without showing any symptoms at all.

Swine dysentery can strike pigs who have gone through central markets or auctions. Afflicted animals pass copious amounts of bloody diarrhea. Sanitation and good stock are the keys to preventing this killer.

Butchering

Hog butchering is an old rural American tradition that is still very much alive in farm country and on the homestead. The feeding and growth cycle culminates at the ideal time for this task. Generally, hog butchering takes place in fall after the crops and garden have been harvested, before the cold blasts of winter, but when the weather is brisk enough to chill the meat without the need for a walk-in cooler.

Pigs should be kept off feed for a day or so before butchering, as this will leave less undigested food and waste in the swine's system. Provide water to the animal. One popular method for delivering the coup de grace in the U.S. is with a .22 caliber rifle. The .22 LR bullet should be placed a fraction of an inch to the left of dead center on the hog's skull, just above the left eye.

Once the pig is dead, the jugular vein is severed for bleeding. It should take around 10 minutes for the pig to bleed out.

Some homesteaders prefer tying a rear leg with a rope and doing the job with a sharp knife and a quick, decisive incision to the jugular vein rather than using a gun.

Scraping Or Skinning?

There are two schools of thought on what to do with a pig's hide and hair. Traditionally, the hair is scraped off the hide, leaving the hide on the meat until it's cut up. The alternative is to skin the animal. Some people think skinning is easier. However, hams keep better with the skin on.

If you plan to scrape the hair off the hog, a large container for dunking the carcass in hot water will be needed. Typically, a 55-gallon drum, old bathtub or stock tank is used for this task. The water will need to be heated to at least 145°F before the hog is dunked.

Dunk the carcass for a two- to three-minute soak, remove, and begin scraping hair off with a bell scraper. This venerable farm tool will pull the hair off when it is applied with a steady, circular motion. A dull knife can be used for hair removal if a scraper isn't available. A second session in the boiling water may be needed as the hair becomes more difficult to remove. The head and feet are the hardest areas to scrape. Once the job is done, even a black swine will be white.

For skinning, Klobner recommends an obstruction-free site with plenty of room to work. The hog is placed below a supporting pole. A short, vertical cut is made just above the hoof of both rear legs.

A strong leg tendon is carefully exposed and pulled from the tissue. The tendons are hung on a bar attached to the hoist, and the carcass can be lifted. If the tendons tear, the foot is tied on with wire.

Circular cuts are made above both hooves, and the skin is cut and pulled off much like what is done with a deer, except that you're working from back to front. A good skinning knife will be needed to pull the skin off the muscle. A circular incision through the skin at the top of the tail will allow you to skin the hams.

Once the hams are skinned, you'll need to make a long cut from vent to head. Loosen with the knife and pull the hide down. Now turn your attention to the front legs and reverse the procedure used for skinning the back legs. Cut completely around the head and remove the hide in one piece.

To remove the head, use a heavy knife, cutting just above the ears at the first point of the backbone and across back of the neck. Continue to cut around ears to the eyes and the point of the jawbone, which will leave the jowls in place. Don't throw the head away, as it contains a good deal of meat once it is skinned. For now, keep it cool in a bucket of water.

Now the carcass is ready for evisceration, or gutting. The carcass is cut open from the hams all the way down. A meat saw will come in handy here, as the breastbone and pelvic girdle will need to be cut in half.

Cut around the bung and pull it down. The entrails will come out with some cutting and pulling. If you kept the pig off feed before butchering, the intestines and stomach will be much easier to work with at this stage.

Cut the liver from the offal and carefully remove the gall bladder. Cut off the heart and wash it. Hang the liver on a peg through the thick end and split the thin end to promote drainage. Hang the heart by the pointed end to drain it.

If the intestines are to be used for sausage casings, turn them inside out, wash, scrape with a dull stick and soak in a weak lime water solution for 12 hours. A solution of one tablespoon of baking soda to two gallons of water will also work.

The carcass is washed with water, and the backbone split with a meat saw. You'll see the snow-white leaf lard. Pull this out for rendering. Now it's time for cooling the carcass, and fall is the ideal season for natural refrigeration. Ideally, the temperature should be in the 34° to 40° F range for 24 hours.

A pig consists of five major parts: ham, loin, shoulder, bacon and jowl. Miscellaneous pieces or trimmings go into the sausage pile. You'll need a large enough surface to work on half a hog at a time.

To remove the jowl, saw at the shoulder between the third and fourth ribs. A large knife will work better than the saw once you get through the ribs. The jowl is trimmed and cut into a “bacon square” that can be used like bacon or as a flavoring ingredient in beans and other dishes.

Now remove the neck bone at the shoulder and trim off the meat. Cut off the shank above the knee joint. The shoulder can be cured or divided into a picnic shoulder and a butt. Fat on top of the butt can be trimmed for lard rendering. The lean portion is commonly known as a Boston butt.

To remove the ham, saw on a line at right angles to the hind shank to a point a couple of inches in front of the aitchbone. A knife will be needed to complete this cut. Remove the tail bone with the knife. It’s best to trim loose and small pieces of meat for sausage, since they will dry up in the ham cure.

Saw the shank off at the button of the hock. To separate the loin from the belly, saw across ribs one-third of the way from the top of the backbone to the bottom of the belly. The tenderloin (the most expensive part of the pig in grocery stores) should come off with the loin.

Place the belly on the table skin side up, smooth out the wrinkles, and loosen the spareribs with a few solid whacks from a cleaver. Turn it over, loosen the neck bone at the top of the ribs and trim as close as you can.

The bacon is next. Begin at the lower edge, cut straight and remove the mammary glands. Trim the top parallel to the bottom, squaring off both ends. Take the scraps and add them to the sausage or lard piles.

That small, lean muscle underneath the backbone at the rear of the loin is the tenderloin. This primo cut is trimmed and set aside for a special meal. Trim all but a quarter inch of backfat from the loin.

The average home butcher won’t be able to cut thin “breakfast chops” with his meat saw and knives. For that you need a bandsaw. That means thick chops for dinner, but that shouldn’t lead to any complaints!

Plan ahead when butchering. You’ll need a good block of time, quality knives, sharpeners or whetstones and adequate freezer or refrigerator space for the various cuts. Don’t expect your first efforts to look as precise as what is sold at the supermarket. More importantly, your meat will taste much better and have been raised cleaner than those pretty cuts.

Ham, Bacon And Sausage

Tired of the bland “water added” hams that are common today? Perhaps you’d rather avoid nitrites. Why not make your own ham and bacon?

The first and most crucial step is to chill the meat down to 40° F or lower. Excess blood in the meat can also promote spoilage, so make sure the hog is thoroughly bled when it is slaughtered.

Meats can be brine cured or dry cured. With large hams and other hefty cuts, the liquid solution should be injected into the heart of the meat with a brine pump, which looks like a large hypodermic needle. Two pounds of a curing solution are mixed with three quarts of water and pumped into the ham.

If you’re concerned about spoilage, it would be wise to take the large cuts and divide them into smaller portions. I know of one hog-raising friend who anxiously looked forward to dining on his homegrown 20-pound ham. It looked fine after curing and was soon roasting in the oven. The ham was placed on the table with great anticipation. After some slices were carved, it was discovered that the interior of the ham had gone bad. This might not have happened had a meat pump been used. Unless you’re planning to play host for a big gathering, it would be more practical to divide a large ham into more manageable portions.

Stone crocks, wooden barrels and plastic containers may be used for brine cures. Pour the brine over the meat, and keep it weighted down to prevent floating. Allow four days per pound for curing. Remove the meat and repack once a week for curing. If the brine is slimy, mix a new solution, wash off the meat and repack. Remember that partially cured meat has absorbed a fair amount of salt, so a new brine mix should be weaker.

For a dry cure, take five pounds of brown sugar, five pounds of noniodized salt, two ounces each of black pepper and cayenne pepper and two ounces of saltpeter. Combine ingredients thoroughly and rub the mix all over the meat. Make sure to rub the cure in well, especially around the bones.

Leave the meat sitting overnight in a animal- and insect-proof place. Allow for seepage, as much of the moisture will be drained away. Repeat the dry cure application every day for a week, turning the meat upside down on alternate days.



Store the meat in a rodent-proof box or wooden barrel that has several holes in the bottom for seepage. The meat should remain undisturbed for at least six weeks. Some people place wheat bran or oats between each layer of meat, but that's not an absolute necessity.

A cool place with a steady temperature such as a basement is a good place to cure meat.

After curing, the hams and bacons can be smoked.

With the use of saltpeter, a properly cured ham can go without refrigeration for a year. Chances are that you'll consume it long before it gets that old!

Depending on one's opinion, sausage making can be anything from a way to use up meat scraps to a gourmet's delight or a fulfilling hobby. The easiest way to start is to take the odd pieces from your homestead hog and grind and form them into breakfast sausage patties. Sage and salt are the traditional seasonings, but this is an opportunity to make a custom product especially suited to your tastes.

Numerous books on the sausage-making process are available, and most sausage recipes call for at least some pork. Your homestead hog can become bratwurst, hot dogs, Polish sausage, pepperoni, braunschweiger (liver sausage), chorizo, Italian sausage, summer sausage and dozens of other treats.

What's bad for the commercial farmer can be an opportunity for the homesteader. Meat-type pigs are available for low prices, and supplies are abundant. There's no better time to start a homestead hog operation than now!

The Farrowing Pen



Piglets must be kept warm and dry, and protected from being crushed by the sow.

What if you plan to breed your own sows? A farrowing pen could help prevent the common problem of sows laying on and crushing their young. It is estimated that five percent of the piglets born are killed when their mothers accidentally lay on them.

These structures also provide the sow with some privacy as she farrows, or gives birth. The rule of thumb is a crate that is 5' x 7'. The central portion of the crate is 2' x 7'. It is designed to prevent the sow from flopping on nursing piglets or turning around and stepping on her young.

Since the farrowing crate holds the sow in a restricted position, birthing will take place in a predictable space. The design allows the farmer to easily reach the piglets and provide supplemental heat. Nursing goes on as it would if the sow were outside the crate, but piglet mortality is greatly reduced.

While many commercially made farrowing crates are made of steel tubing or pipe, the homesteader can put together his own unit from boards and scrap lumber. All you need is a 5' x 7' wooden floor (solid pallets might suffice), pig guards to keep the sow from rolling on her offspring, and some simple walls.



Small Farm Pig Equipment



6

PIG POINTERS FOR BEGINNERS

BY SAMUEL E. LEDSWORTH

I have picked up a number of pig-raising pointers that would be useful to those interested in having inexpensive pork. Buy two or three feeder pigs early in the summer. Multiple hogs do better than just one, because they will eat more feed in order to get it away from the others. When raised individually, a pig will eat what it wants and walk away.

Buy females. Have them bred to farrow as early in the spring as possible. The sow is growing as she is carrying the piglets. By selling the six to eight-week-old feeders, you will meet expenses, and your pork will be “free.”

When I want to keep a sow for more than one litter, I keep the one that raised the most pigs. I like to keep a young pig every year. They have a tendency to get too big and clumsy when they get older. Hogs also lose their market value after they get over 250 pounds.

TIPS & TRICKS

1

CUTTING FEED COSTS

If you live near a grain elevator that has a cleaning system, you can save on feed costs by salvaging the cleanings. They will probably give them to you for cleaning them up. If the elevator does the cleaning, you can probably buy them at a discount.

Another way to cut costs is to buy standing corn at farm auctions. Ask if you may pick a row of corn before the sale. If the answer is yes, pick a row, count the number of ears, then multiply the number of rows. This will give you an idea of how much corn there is and what to bid.

I feed grain twice a day – all the pigs will clean up in a half hour. At noon, I cut a good-sized wheelbarrow of weeds or clover and throw that to them to eat.

2

HOMEMADE FEED RATION

Another way to help the feed situation is to plant a lot of squash, pumpkin and sunflowers and use them to make a feed ration. Here’s how I do it.

Get a feed cooker or old cast iron bathtub. Put it on a couple of I-beams or angle irons to get it off the ground. Pour in three or four pails of water, smash several pumpkins and squash and throw them in. Start a fire underneath the kettle or tub and cook until soft.

While still hot, put two or three buckets of this slop in a barrel and add some chopped or ground grain. Keep adding squash and grain until the barrel is three-quarters full. Mix the contents of the barrel with a large stick and cover with a piece of plywood. The grain should be cooked by the time the pumpkin and squash have cooled. You can also add milk if it’s available.

3

KEEP RECORDS

If a friend or neighbor says it doesn't pay to raise hogs, ask to see his records. He probably won't have any! I do keep records of how much feed I buy and how much it costs, so I know what I'm talking about.

If you think you're losing money, it's easy to check if you have records. Find out the current price of hogs, estimate what yours weigh, then determine what price you could get for them. The difference between the market value and your costs will tell you exactly how you are doing.

I castrate pigs at about four weeks old. They have a mud hole they can lay in to ease the pain. Be sure to castrate the babies somewhere that Mama can't get in, as she will try to tear you apart when the babies start squealing.

4

CURING BLACK TEETH

I throw a piece of soft coal about the size of a melon in the yard to prevent problems with black (needle) teeth, the baby teeth that never come out. I've seen little pigs stand by a trough of feed and squeal their heads off because their mouths were so sore from black teeth that they couldn't eat.

The teeth can be broken off or cut with a pair of wire cutters. Pigs will break off black teeth themselves if given a lump of coal.

5

GETTING RID OF LICE

Get a four- to five-foot pipe with a diameter of 1-1/2 to two inches. Drill small holes from one end to the center. Drive the pipe halfway into the ground and wire some burlap around it. Fill the pipe with old oil. The oil will seep into the burlap, and the pigs will rub against it. Lice can't stand oil. Refill the pipe occasionally.

6

FARROWING DURING COLD SPELLS

If your sow farrows during a cold spell, it pays to put the newborns in a small box and take them someplace dry and warm. Piglets can stand the cold much better after they are dried and have a belly full of milk.

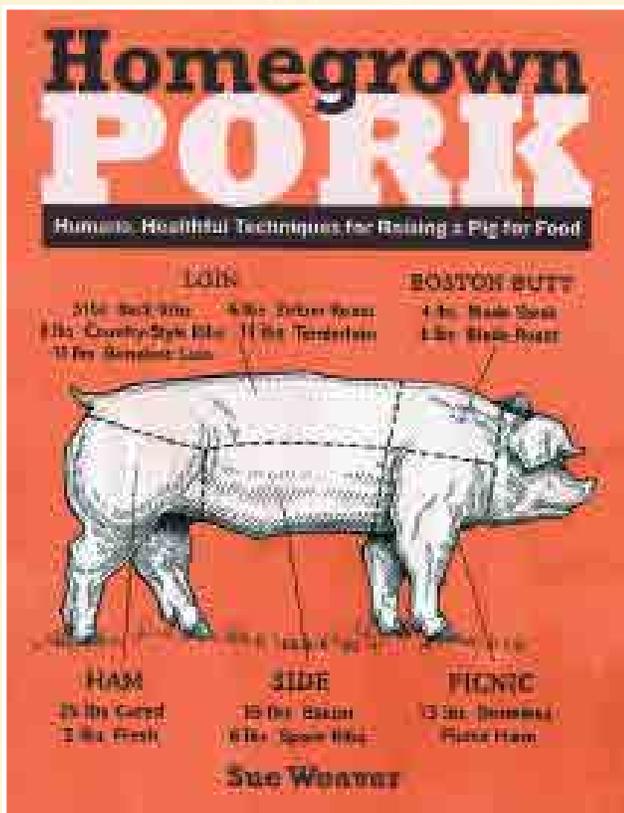
Fasten a 2" x 12" plank about 12" to 16" off the floor around the walls of the farrowing house before the sow farrows. This will provide some protection for piglets if the sow lies down between the little pig and the wall. Poles can also be used.

I like pigs because they are a clean animal if kept in a good-sized yard. Pigs generally relieve themselves in a far corner. A cow, horse, goat or fowl will relieve themselves right where they are eating.



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for Raising a Pig for Food

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BY SUE WEAVER

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