History of Pigs

Scientists believe pigs have been around for 40 million years. Descendants of those animals are known to have been domesticated between 7,000–9,000 years ago in China.

Domesticated pigs first arrived in North America in the 1500s. It is believed that Christopher Columbus had eight pigs traveling with him to the “New World.”

In the 1600s, raising pigs for food became popular in the eastern United States. Settlers heading west in the 1700s took pigs with them. Pig farms and processing facilities popped up across the U.S. as the demand for pork grew.

By the mid-1900s, farmers realized the value in raising pigs indoors to better control feed costs and pigs’ growth. Advancements in reproduction and disease control in the 1980s propelled the United States as the world leader in pork production. Today, 26% of U.S. Pork is exported and relied upon by over 100 nations.

The average American eats approximately 49 pounds of pork per year.

The world's largest bacon plant is in Wilson County.

Pork is the most consumed protein in the world!

A pig will roll in the mud to stay cool because they lack sweat glands.

DID YOU KNOW???

The world’s largest pork processing plant is in Bladen County.

Pigs can drink up to 14 gallons of water every day.

There are more than 2,100 pig farms in North Carolina.

A pig has 15,000 taste buds while humans only have 9,000.

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FUN FACT:

Pigs are among the smartest of all domesticated animals including dogs.

At Lamb Family Farms, a nursery farm in Sampson County, farming is a family affair. Learn more here!

Many Thanks!

Thank you to Christie Frederick, Wayne County Farm Bureau Kenan Fellow, for her efforts in assembling the content necessary to produce this publication.

THANK YOU!
The gestation phase for a female pig is 3 months, 3 weeks, and 3 days. Once a gilt, also known as the female pig, gives birth it is called a sow. Sows are housed in a farrowing barn where the piglets are born. The sow is put into a special area called a farrowing stall. This specially designed stall has adjustable rails so that the sow won’t hurt the piglets accidentally when she lays down or rolls over. It allows the piglets to safely nurse, run around, and stay warm under heating lamps. When the piglets are born they weigh approximately 2-3 pounds. At about 21 days, weighing 13-15 pounds, they are weaned from their mother and moved to the nursery. There is a high level of biosecurity on a farrowing farm. What does this mean? Biosecurity is the process of washing, changing, sanitizing, and wearing clean clothing and boots to keep livestock healthy. When entering a farrowing/sow farm all visitors and employees are required to shower before entering. They then put on clean clothes and boots provided by the farm. This helps to keep all outside germs away from the newborn piglets.

Gestation & Farrowing
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NURSERY
The nursery is the next farm of the process. In the nursery the pigs receive a specially mixed starter diet of corn, soybeans, and supplements of vitamins and/or minerals. This mixture is designed to help them grow quickly while staying healthy. As a pig matures their diet changes to meet their health needs at each life stage. The pigs stay in the nursery for 42–56 days (6–8 weeks). At this point in the process the pigs weigh between 50–60 pounds. Some of the female gilts will be moved to a breeding room while others move to a finishing barn.

FINISHING
From the nursery the pigs are moved to the finishing barn to help accommodate their growing size. They stay in the finishing barn for 115–120 days (16–17 weeks). During this phase they consume 9–10 pounds of feed daily to ensure proper health and growth. In the finishing barn, pigs have constant access to food and water. But did you know that pigs are one of the few animals that won’t overeat? Their diet is perfectly balanced to this point and by 6 months, the pigs weigh about 280 pounds and are ready to go to market.

VOCABULARY
Biosecurity – procedures intended to protect humans and livestock against disease and harmful biological agents such as washing and disinfecting the animals living area while wearing clean clothing and boots.
Boar – an uncastrated male hog of breeding age.
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What is the “We Care” pork initiative?
The pork industry’s “We Care” initiative is a promise that farmers are committed to the well-being of their animals. This initiative is a pledge by producers in the pork industry to produce safe food, while being stewards of the environment and good neighbors. There is a core set of six principles in the initiative. They are as follows:

Producing safe food
Providing safe, wholesome food is the most important responsibility. Farmers work hard to employ a wide variety of technology and techniques to minimize food safety threats.

Protect and promote animal well being
Today’s pigs are raised on farms that are dedicated to the health and well-being of the animal from the day they are born. To help in this fight most pigs are raised indoors with limited access to people and other animals. Farmers manage biosecurity by logging everyone and everything that comes into contact with their animals.

Safeguarding natural resources and the environment
North Carolina farmers are committed to protecting our natural resources. One example of sustainable animal agriculture is the cycle of using animal manure as natural fertilizer for crops. These crops then eventually become feed for the animals.

Did you know...
all pigs have small eyes and poor eyesight.

What are hog lagoons?
Hog lagoons are pools of waste. Lagoons are used to collect manure and urine from the animals as waste to be broken down when mixed with water. Manure and urine are washed out from underneath the barns and into a lagoon 4 to 12 times a day. Most new flush waste facilities have slotted floors that allow manure to fall through the floor onto a slotted concrete alley. The flushed manure goes through a pipe to the lagoon or storage pond. Microorganisms, or beneficial bacteria, that decompose the manure and create a nitrogen-rich fertilizer. Farmers remove water from the top of the lagoon and spray it on their fields to feed the crops as a fertilizer. This process also creates methane gas, which can be captured and used to create electricity.

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Jay Archer
Farm Manager

Tell me a bit about your job.

I am a 2,400-sow farm manager for Smithfield Hog Production in Tarboro, NC. The farm style is Batch Farrowing, meaning I only sell wean pigs once a month (4,500) as opposed to weekly. My hours range from 45–60 hours a week.

What would a typical day on the job look like for you?

That depends on what week we are on in the cycle. For two weeks, we are busy weaning pigs, washing farrowing rooms, loading farrowing rooms, breeding, and farrowing. The following two weeks are much slower. These are spent doing farm maintenance and personalized pig care.

What is the best part of your job?

I love animals and enjoy the mix of people I have the pleasure to work with. I have worked with people from all over the world and really enjoy hearing their stories about what brought them to the industry.

Denise W. Mason
Career Development Coordinator

Tell me a bit about your job.

I work directly with production trainees and new employees while focusing on developing their leadership skills as well as animal husbandry and stockmanship skills. I also teach Pork Quality Assurance and CPR to all of our company employees at Maxwell Foods, a division of Goldsboro Milling Company.

How has education helped you in your current job?

Education taught me the science behind how we raise our animals and also about the discipline needed to start and finish projects. I learned the importance of educating others about agriculture.

How do you advocate for the industry?

I serve on the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Pork Council. I am also currently a member of Pork Leadership Institute (PLI), a joint leadership program between the National Pork Board and the National Pork Producers Council.

Maurice Zarate
Swine Nutritionist

Tell me a bit about your job.

One of my responsibilities at Goldsboro Milling Company is to design diets based on a pig’s needs at each stage when growing. Because the nutritional needs of a pig changes as it grows, diets are changed about nine different times. By feeding a diet of exactly what the pig needs, we can reduce waste into the environment. I also ensure farmers order the correct diet based on the stage of pig they have. We continually run research trials to learn what diets are better to help pigs grow faster.

What does a typical day on the job look like for you?

I review reports showing the quality of ingredients as they arrive at the mill and make sure we are using the right amounts by checking inventory reports. I meet with mill managers or the production team to discuss how pig growth is responding to feed we are giving them.

Robert Parker
Livestock Transporter

Tell me a bit about your job.

I work for TDM Farms, Inc. and transport different sizes of swine, from young weaned pigs to adult hogs. My hours of weekly work depend on transportation schedules for moving livestock.

What does a typical day on the job look like for you?

I start by checking transport equipment and prepare animal bedding in the trailer. If needed, I adjust winter slides according to outside temperatures to keep animals as comfortable as possible. Then I travel to a farm for a scheduled loading time. I finally load and transport animals to an assigned destination.

How has education played a role in your current position?

Education is an important part of this job, you use different skill sets from operating transport equipment to figuring correct spacing of animals on transport trailers.

Candied Bacon

Candied bacon is a wonderful food that combines salty, sweet, and crispy. If it's made correctly, the bacon will have crispy edges and a sugary crust.

Ingredients

- 12 slices of bacon
- 1/3 cup of light brown sugar
- “Optional ground black pepper
- 1. Preheat oven to 325° F.
- 2. Place bacon in a bowl and coat with sugar. “Optional-sprinkle black pepper in with sugar.
- 3. Cover a baking sheet with parchment paper and place bacon in a single layer on the parchment paper.
- 4. Sprinkle any remaining sugar on top of the bacon that you have placed on the baking sheet.
- 5. Put the baking sheet into the oven and bake for 20 minutes. After 20 minutes check to see if the bacon is crispy and brown. If not, bake for an additional 10 to 15 minutes.
- 6. Remove from the oven once crispy and enjoy!