

Livestock Toolkit - Pigs

This is a basic description of what you need to do and consider in order to look after pigs. We really hope that you find it useful!

One of the most important pieces of advice that we can give you is to find other small holders or pig keepers in your area. Before we got pigs on our farm we made a few visits to local keepers and the chance to pick their brains was well worth the effort. We found that they were all lovely people, who were happy to help us – many of them still do today. Also, don't worry about scrounging! We were able to save and repair two discarded (and rather worse for wear) pig arks, which, after a bit of TLC and some marine ply are as good as new. All-in-all, where two brand new pre-made pig arks could have cost us a few hundred pounds we got ours for a few quid.

Site

The first thing that you should think about when considering pigs is 'where will they go on my site?'. Things to consider are:

Food and Water – Fully grown pigs will eat a lot of food and can drink a lot of water, so you don't want to keep your animals too far away from these resources – if you do you'll have to do a lot of carrying!

Wallow – In the summer your pigs will need a wallow in order to cool themselves down. On LVCF we're lucky enough to have a spring on the site, so we have an almost constant wallow in the pig pen. You may have to create your own using stored water – again, you don't want to keep your animals too far from your water source.

Drainage – However, you don't want your site to be too wet. We've just discovered that after prolonged heavy rain our spring tends to make the pig pen a bit of a quagmire. While the pigs can cope with it better than we can, there comes a point when a pen is too muddy even for grown pigs. So you should choose a spot that won't become too waterlogged.

Shade – Your site should also provide your pigs with some shade, as pigs are susceptible to sunburn. Shade can be natural or man-made.

Consider your neighbours – On LVCF we placed our pigs far from residential housing; pigs can make a lot of noise, and if you have a few animals they can also make a bit of a smell – so as part of our attempt to be a good neighbour we decided it was best to situate our pigs far from housing.

How many pigs do you want? – It's also important that you have an idea about how many pigs you would like to have, how much space they'll need and if you can fit them in. We currently have 9 Saddlebacks on the farm, and we keep them in a pen which is 25m x 25m. This is more than adequate, and in fact would probably hold close to 15 pigs

comfortably. It is also wise to consider the future – are you planning to have more pigs in the future? In which case do you require more space? Or are you planning on setting up a rotation to let one pig pen rest, while the other has pigs on it.

The best site will satisfy all of these criteria

Fencing

LVCF is situated on a site close to a busy road and residential housing. Also, by the nature of our farm, we won't necessarily have people on or close to the farm at all times. Therefore we decided to construct a fairly heavy-duty and (hopefully!) escape proof fence.

We opted for stock fencing, with a top rail and an inner electrified wire.

The electrified wire was put in place to dissuade the pigs from nosing/digging under the fence. This has worked extremely well for us, but the pigs often ground the wire and so nullify the electric shock – we often have to do a 'walk around' the pen to check that the pigs haven't covered up the wire.

The stock fencing is a wire mesh which runs between posts that are driven deeply into the ground. We used a galvanised wire so that it was resistant to the elements. Again, this fence has performed admirably, we've had no issues with it at all – so while it was quite expensive, it's been worth every penny in security and piece-of-mind.

The top rail performs two tasks. It protects the stock mesh, and gives people a nice place to lean on while admiring our wonderful pigs!



Fig 1: Our fence – you can clearly see all of the aspects of the fence, posts, mesh, top rail and electric wire.

Our 25m x 25m fence cost us about £400, and we had to construct it ourselves. Not too bad a job if you have a few people around to help out!

Getting your pigs

First things first – what type of pigs do you want? The choice is a personal one, and I'm sure that whichever breed you go for you'll be happy with your choice! We found that the biggest considerations that we had were 1) How close is the breeder to our farm? and 2) Is it a large or a small animal (we opted for a smaller breed to start with – they seemed less daunting at the time!) and 3) when will the animal be ready for us (and when will we be ready for it!?)

So now you've chosen which breed you want, the next step is finding your supplier. When we did this the plan was really just a google onslaught! There are useful sites out there (e.g. <http://www.saddlebacks.org.uk/>) which can point you in the direction of local breeders. After targeting some of the more local breeders the next step was simply to email them. We found that all of the breeders we got in contact with were really friendly, and they were all willing to help a novice get sorted.

We ended up choosing Saddleback pigs, and paid £45 per weaner, which was a very good price.

Feed Costs

Raising pigs can become quite a costly task, so it is good to know in advance how expensive the feed will be.

While I was doing research into raising pigs I stumbled upon a wonderfully useful website (www.theaccidentalsmallholder.com). They give an approximate guide to feeding your pig which seems to have worked well on our animals.

The general rule of thumb is 1lb of feed per pig per month of age, to a max of 6 lbs per pig per day (1 kg = 2.2 lbs).

We give our animals two feeds a day, one in the morning and one in the evening.

So for a pig of 2 months of age you should give it 2 lbs of food per day, 1lb in the morning and 1 lb in the evening.

Currently our 9 Saddlebacks are 6 months old, so they get 54 lbs of food per day (approx. 25kg!). 27 lbs in the morning and 27 lbs in the evening.

A local food supplier provides 25 kg bags of pig grower nuts for about £7.50 each. That means that for this entire month we're spending about £225 on food.

Following this rule 1 pig costs about £80 to feed from 2 months to 6 months old.

We also give our pigs supplements. They get most of the off cuts and waste from the veg patch, and we have organised regular collections from local grocers to take away produce they can't sell, but which our pigs love!

Collecting your pigs

You've planned out the costs, and you're in contact with a breeder. So what now? Unfortunately it's paperwork. But don't worry it's really quite straight forward. This is a very useful site (<http://www.thepigsite.com/articles/?Display=1153>).

Essentially, what you need is a code which allows you to move your pigs from the breeder to your site. This is the CPH (County Parish Holding) number, with this number and a General License (which you get can get from DEFRA) you can move your pigs.

Once the pigs are on your land you initial a 'Standstill' – No pigs can leave or enter your site for 20 days, and no cattle, sheep or goats for 6 days.

You also need to register your animals with DEFRA, to do this you must contact you local Animal Health Officer, who will the give you an identification code called a Herd Number.

Slaughter and Butchery

It's important that you've considered this even before you buy your pigs. A quick bit of research into local abattoirs and somebody who can butcher your pigs early on, will save you a massive headache later on. You'll also need to organise some kind of animal transport to take your pigs to the abattoir.

We use a very local abattoir and butcher, the cost is about £25 per pig for the slaughter and basic butchery, and we pay an extra £15 per pig for sausages.

Happy pigging!

The Loxley Valley Community Farm Livestock Committee