



TOP 10 GUIDE OF THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT RAISING PIGS

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This guide is not designed to be a comprehensive resource for all aspects of small-scale pig farming. Rather, it provides some advice on things to consider before starting. If you need more information, the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#) provides much more detail for you and your farm in key areas of pig farming. Whatever your plans are, this resource is here to help you along the way.

The Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual is designed for people who are interested in raising pigs on a small-scale basis. Maybe you are new to raising pigs. Perhaps you have been at it for a while and still have questions about different aspects of pig management. The objective of the Manual is to provide you with information in key areas to help you raise pigs successfully and responsibly.

The Manual builds on the experience of small-scale pig farmers who have learned by doing. They have spent a great deal of time and resources fine-tuning their farms to raise their pigs successfully. We designed this “Top 10 Guide of Things to Know About Raising Pigs” from excerpts in the Manual to help you focus on the most important aspects for your farm and, hopefully, avoid pitfalls along the way.

If you have questions or require additional information, please contact your provincial pork organization or ministry of agriculture. Contact info is provided on Page 5 of the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).

01 | Where to Start

- ▶ **START SMALL.** Many small-scale pig farmers recommend starting with two to four weaner/feeder pigs (20-25 kg) in the spring and raise them until slaughter/market weight (100-130 kg). Do this for a couple of years before considering increasing the total number of weaner/feeder pigs or adding breeding animals to your farm. That way, the size of your pig herd will not outpace your experience and your capacity to care for or market them.
- ▶ **BREED SELECTION.** There are a number of different breeds that could be a good fit for your operation, including Kunekune, Tamworth, Berkshire, Hereford, Hampshire, White pigs (Landrace, Yorkshire), Red Wattle, or Mangalitsa. The type of pig that best fits your operation will depend on your goals. Each breed will have distinctive advantages and shortfalls depending on nutrition (pasture/grain), housing environment (outdoor/indoor), management (temperament and hardiness), finishing time, and meat quality attributes.
- ▶ For tips on **WHERE TO FIND PIGS**, the types of questions to ask prior to purchasing them, and breed selection, refer to Section 1 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).
- ▶ There are **LEGAL REQUIREMENTS** for registering your farm with the provincial government and for reporting movements of pigs. For tips on how to comply with the laws, refer to Section 2 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).
- ▶ **HEALTHY PIGS.** Regardless of the number, type or breed of pig you purchase, the most important aspect is to purchase from a healthy herd. This can alleviate a lot of potential problems, as cheap pigs tend not to be cheap in the long run. One place to avoid is auction marts, as pigs from multiple sources may be mixed there. It is recommended to buy from a single source herd that has been tested and is free of or vaccinated for common diseases. Quarantining your pigs when they arrive on your farm is an important part in maintaining the health and safety of your herd.
- ▶ **VETERINARIANS** should be an important part of your operation. In some regions however, it can be difficult to find one with pig experience. It is recommended to locate a veterinarian prior to purchasing pigs to ensure they can assist you when required. You will need a relationship with one in order to get prescription products (e.g. dewormers, vaccines, antibiotics) that help to protect your pigs' health.
- ▶ For tips on how to **KEEP YOUR PIGS HEALTHY**, refer to Sections 8 and 9 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).
- ▶ **BOOK SLAUGHTER SPACE IN ADVANCE.** Ensure you can market your pigs when they get to market weight. Many abattoirs require booking a spot two or more months in advance. Make sure to book ahead, possibly even before buying any pigs. You do not want to end up with unmarketable pigs, especially if you do not have a contingency plan to care for them.

02 | How to House a Pig

- ▶ Proper housing is one of the most important components in raising pigs. Shelters can be simple to complex in nature but must provide pigs protection from adverse weather conditions – cold protection in the winter and heat/sunburn protection in the summer. Pigs will require additional bedding throughout the winter and shade and water to cool off in the summer.
- ▶ Pigs can be raised in a number of ways, including 100% outdoor (pasture) production, a small barn, or a combination of indoor/outdoor production. The type of shelter will depend on how you choose to raise pigs and the resources available to you.
- ▶ Options for shelters include a well-constructed shed, arch, hoop structure, small barn, or large (round) bales arranged in a circle. Regardless of the type of shelter you choose, it is essential to provide pigs protection from adverse weather.
- ▶ For more tips on constructing shelters for your pigs, refer to Section 3 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).



03 | How to Fence a Pig

- ▶ Fencing is a critical factor in raising pigs. You should give strong consideration to your fencing options prior to bringing pigs home, as pigs can be escape artists. Escaped pigs can form wild populations that heighten other pig farms' disease risk.
- ▶ Fencing provides a barrier to keep pigs within a specific area, in addition to keeping predators and unwanted visitors out. Pigs will root or dig under a fence that is not properly designed.
- ▶ It is important to monitor and maintain fences, specifically looking for weak spots when using page wire, wooden, or mesh fences, and ensure proper grounding of electric fences to avoid electrical shorts.
- ▶ If using an electric fence for your pens, it is recommended to also have an outer perimeter fence to protect your pigs from predators and other wildlife.
- ▶ Double-layered fencing, such as electric fenced pens within a larger perimeter fence, can also help prevent nose-to-nose contact with wildlife that can put your pigs at risk of contracting a disease.
- ▶ For tips on constructing and maintaining fences for your pigs, refer to Section 3 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).



04 | How to Feed and Water a Pig

This section provides a brief overview on the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and WHY of providing adequate feed and water to your pigs. For more tips, refer to Section 5 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).



WHO

- ▶ You are responsible for ensuring pigs are provided proper nutrition and quantity of feed and water on a daily basis.
- ▶ You are responsible to ensure their diets do not contain meat or meat products. It is possible for these to give your pigs a disease. It is also an illegal practice under the federal *Health of Animals Regulations*; this includes all pet foods that contain meat or meat by-products and food waste containing meat.

WHAT

- ▶ Pigs can be raised on a variety of feeds, as long as the nutritional requirements for various stages of production are met. It is important to note that pigs cannot be raised on pasture alone and will require additional feed for proper growth and development. There are several options to consider when feeding your pigs:
 - **Complete Feeds** Typically purchased from a feed mill and designed to meet all the nutritional requirements of your pigs.
 - **Grain-Based Homemade Feeds** Typically consist of grain(s) and need additional supplementation to meet your pigs' nutritional requirements.
 - **Produce-Based Homemade Feeds** Utilize fruits and vegetables in the feeding program and require additional supplementation. Special attention must be given to ensure the produce has not come in contact with meat or meat products. For this reason, table scraps should never be fed to your pigs.





WHERE

- ▶ While the type of feeder you can use to feed your pigs can vary, the proper placement of the feeder can alleviate additional work and stress (for pigs and people) associated with feeding your pigs. The first and most important step is to ensure feeders are easily accessible to all pigs and located in a position where contamination will be minimized.



WHEN

- ▶ Pigs need to be fed everyday, with the amount of feed they require being dependant on their breed, age, sex, stage of growth, condition, and type of ingredients used. Typically, sows and boars are fed once or twice per day, while growing pigs would ideally have access to feed 24 hours a day.

WHY

- ▶ Poorly balanced or nutritionally inadequate diets (especially in energy) not only result in higher feed intake but can result in pigs that get sick more easily, grow slowly, convert feed inefficiently, and produce a poorer quality carcass (too fat and/or low muscle mass).
- ▶ As pigs cannot be raised on pasture alone, the amount of feed provided will need to be adjusted to the age and size of pigs. Pigs raised outdoors require more feed, particularly in colder weather, to maintain their body temperature.

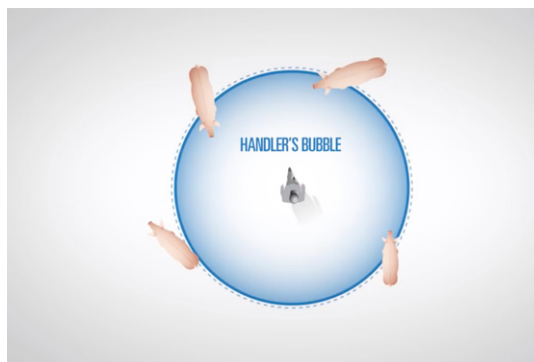
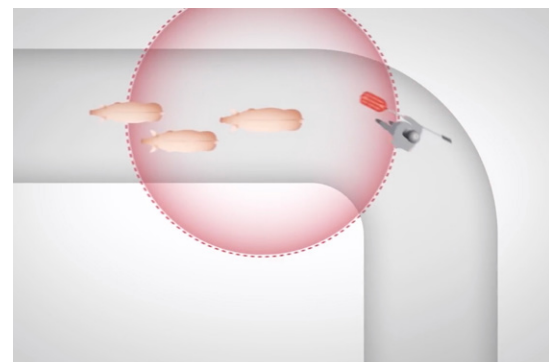
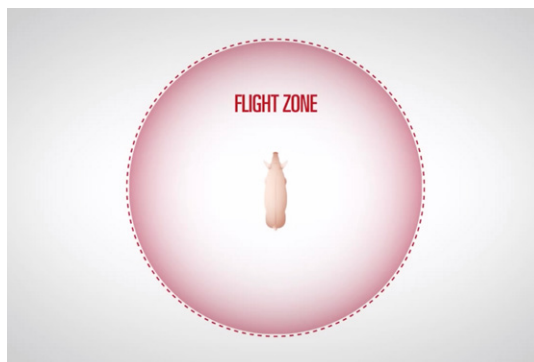


WATER

- ▶ A pig's water intake will be 2-3 times higher than feed intake. Pigs require water continuously (24/7) to grow to their best potential. Water can be delivered in several ways, including a trough, tub, nipple drinker, or water bowl. However, surface water should not be used as a water source for your pigs, as it can attract rodents and birds and become contaminated. Keep in mind the goal is to provide fresh, clean water at all times. Therefore, the system you choose will depend on water source, number of pigs, pasture/penning layout, and season (winter requires preventative measures to avoid freezing).
- ▶ Water quality is essential. When using tubs or troughs, ensure they are cleaned on a regular basis to avoid contamination from manure. You should also consider testing your water (from the drinking source) annually, in addition to regular chlorination, to avoid risks associated with fecal coliforms.

05 | How to Handle a Pig

- ▶ Proper preparation and planning are key steps when handling pigs, leading to reduced stress for the pigs and handler. Knowing when to use appropriate handling equipment, such as sorting boards, shaker paddles, nylon flags, and hog snares, will also help in the handling process.
- ▶ Understanding a pig's flight zone, their tendency to want to stay together as a group, and other pig behaviour will help with pig movement. Usually the fastest way to move hogs is slowly, moving them calmly without loud noises and abrupt physical contact.
- ▶ Special attention and caution must be paid when handling breeding stock (e.g. boars, sows with litters) as they can be unpredictably aggressive.
- ▶ For more tips on handling pigs and handling tools, refer to Section 6 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).



Pigs' "flight zones" (red; above and above left) will collectively form a "bubble" (blue; left) around the handler. A handler can use this bubble to move groups of pigs.

06 | Keeping it Clean

- ▶ While several different types of shelters can be used to raise pigs, it's important that all pens and shelters, including feeders and waterers, be cleaned, disinfected and dried at least annually. While there can be challenges in making this happen, it is important for the health of your pigs.
- ▶ All equipment that comes into direct contact with livestock should be cleaned and disinfected periodically. It is best to have dedicated equipment for use with your farm's pigs only. When sharing equipment with other farms, ensure to clean, disinfect, and dry equipment before using it on your farm.
- ▶ For more tips on how to maintain your pigs' health through regular cleaning, refer to Section 8 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).
- ▶ Slaughter plants (abattoirs) present a high risk for disease contamination and transmission. Without proper care or consideration, you can bring disease back into your herd. A clean trailer, boots and gloves are key components in disease prevention. When delivering pigs, disposable gloves should be worn at the slaughter plant and have a specific set of boots that are not used at home. Always wash, disinfect, and dry your vehicle and trailer prior to returning to your farm from the slaughter plant. Finally, try to avoid seeing your pigs that day when you arrive at home from the slaughter plant and ensure all clothes are washed.
- ▶ For more tips on preventing disease being brought back to your farm from the slaughter plant, refer to Section 12 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).












07 | How to Keep Pigs Healthy

- ▶ Keeping pigs healthy is a comprehensive program that involves providing good feed and water, a clean and appropriate environment, building up a strong immune system, and treating sick pigs. By learning the basics of pig behaviour and normal appearance, you can more easily recognize signs of illness, injury, or disease.
- ▶ Effective disease management involves a three-step approach which includes: prevention, identification, and treatment, where biosecurity is the first step in prevention. You are not alone in this — developing effective herd health and disease management protocols should be completed in coordination with a veterinarian.
- ▶ Understanding terminology and differences between normal and abnormal signs of health is an important part of maintaining the best possible welfare for your pigs. A veterinarian can assist you in developing effective herd health and treatment protocols. Proper implementation of vaccination and deworming programs will reduce health-related issues on your farm.
- ▶ For more tips on maintaining a healthy herd, including sample vaccination and deworming protocols, refer to Section 9 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).
- ▶ Unfortunately, there will be situations where a pig becomes sick or injured with no chance of recovery and will need to be euthanized to relieve their pain and suffering. Your job, as a caregiver, is to recognize when euthanasia is the best treatment option for the pig. When it is, it must be provided as quickly and painlessly as possible. It is not okay to let it suffer and die on its own. For tips on how to recognize when a pig requires euthanasia and how to perform it, refer to Section 10 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).



08 | Top Illnesses of Outdoor Pigs

- ▶ Listed below are some of the most common diseases associated with outdoor production, including their most common clinical signs (symptoms).
- ▶ For specific prevention and treatment programs for each disease, refer to Section 9 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).

DISEASE	CLINICAL SIGNS	DISEASE	CLINICAL SIGNS
Failure to Grow 	Thin, not growing even though others are, spine protruding.	Respiratory Disease 	Coughing, sneezing, breathing hard, standing with elbows protruding out, noisy breathing.
Erysipelas “Diamond Skin Disease” 	Red to purple raised diamond lesions on skin, possible lameness, possible red ears.	Piglet Scours 	Yellow/watery diarrhea from piglets, piglets getting skinny, piglets shivering, possible death in piglets.
Parasites 	Poor growth, hairy, scabby skin, diarrhea, pot bellied and spine protruding.	Salmonella or Ileitis 	Diarrhea in all ages of pigs, poor growth, sepsis, sudden death.
Lameness / Swollen Joints 	Limping, walking on elbows, abnormal gait, and swollen joint or clubbed foot.	Clostridial Disease 	Signs can include sudden death, skin necrosis, bloody diarrhea, sepsis.
Septicemia 	Red/purple ears, possibly red bellies/udders/hind legs, possibly shaking/tremoring, not eating.	Mineral Deficiency 	Most common is iron deficiency in piglets (can lead to pale piglets, anemia, death, and can look like pneumonia).

09 | Supplies and Equipment

- ▶ Being prepared by having essential supplies on hand for most situations that will occur on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis will help you make effective and timely decisions which will benefit you and your pigs. Specific areas of focus include treating and handling pigs and maintaining the health and safety of you and your pigs.
- ▶ You should have a clean medical kit on hand, stored somewhere safe, that includes:
 - Thermometer
 - Medical gloves (e.g. latex or nitrile)
 - Needles and syringes of varying sizes (length and gauge) to match the weight of your pigs
- ▶ In addition, you should have the following supplies on hand:
 - Hog snare
 - Pig (sorting) board
 - Euthanasia tool (e.g. captive bolt gun or firearm)
 - Ear plugs
 - Some kind of soap
 - Some kind of disinfectant (e.g. alcohol, peroxide, iodine)
 - Injectable iron (necessary for piglets)
 - Injectable antibiotics (e.g. penicillin)
 - Injectable anti-inflammatory (e.g. meloxicam)
 - Electrolyte powder
 - Kaolin pectin, activated charcoal, and/or starch product
 - Scalpels (#10 or #15 blades)
 - Needle extension tube (e.g. Slap-Shot®)
 - Identification supplies for shipping pigs to market (e.g. ear tags and tagger, tattoo ink and slap hammer, or stencil and food-safe paint)
- ▶ For more tips on the supplies you should have on hand at the farm, such as handling tools, refer to Sections 6, 7, 9 and 10 in the [Canadian Small-Scale Pig Farming Manual](#).

10 | Emergency Management

- ▶ Make an emergency plan to protect your property, your facilities, and your animals in the event of poor weather, disease outbreak, pigs escaping, equipment failure, or a feed or water supply issue.
- ▶ Create a contact list of emergency telephone numbers, including your neighbours, feed and water suppliers, veterinarian, exterminator, poison control, local animal shelter, animal care and control, transportation resources, local volunteer organizations, and your employees (if applicable). Include an out-of-town contact person who is unlikely to be affected by the same emergency.
- ▶ Make sure all this information is written down and that everyone on your farm and your contact person has a copy. Review, test, and update your emergency plan, supplies, and information regularly.

REPORTABLE SWINE DISEASES IN CANADA

If you see unusual clinical signs (symptoms) in your pigs, do not move your pigs off farm; call a veterinarian immediately. It is your responsibility to recognize and report foreign animal disease (FAD) to a veterinarian.

Federally reportable diseases

For more information, visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) website on reportable diseases for terrestrial animals.

Provincially notifiable diseases

Each province has its own notifiable disease list. It is your responsibility to know which diseases are reportable in your province. Visit your provincial ministry of agriculture website for more information.