

New Entrants to Farming

Bed and Breakfast Pigs



**Farm
Advisory
Service**

National Advice Hub
T: 0300 323 0161
E: advice@fas.scot
W: www.fas.scot

Keeping pigs on a contract rearing or a bed and breakfast basis can be a useful diversification for a farming business. In most cases, existing buildings can be adapted fairly easily to accommodate pigs however, having suitable housing is only the first step. Other key requirements are supplies of good quality water, straw and labour. The other major requirement and perhaps the one that cannot be understated is having a good level of stockmanship and an eye for attention to detail.



Background

Finishing pigs in Scotland are kept in a wide range of accommodation- from purpose built slatted accommodation with liquid feeding to straw bedded courts fed dry meal. Straw courts still have a place for several reasons- they can provide temporary accommodation when units are carrying out depopulations (whereby pigs are moved off the main unit to allow thorough cleaning and restocking with new stock), or even simply the unit has not enough finishing accommodation of its own and needs additional accommodation without the capital investment of building new sheds.

Most contract rearing arrangements will see newly weaned piglets (7.5Kg) or weaners (30kg) kept in straw bedded courts until either moving to other finishing accommodation or being taken right through to slaughter weight (110kg).

This guide looks at the key areas that potential pig keepers need to consider before commencing, and indeed helps to identify adaptations and alterations that may need to be undertaken.

Who supplies what?

In this arrangement, typically each will supply the following

Pig Producer supplies:	Farmer supplies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pigs • Feed • Vet and Med • Management advice • Transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings • Straw • Labour • Power & Machinery • Water

As the pig producer retains ownership of the pigs the farmer essentially has little or no risk and can be paid a set rate per pig per week or batch whilst also retaining valuable farm yard manure allowing reductions in fertiliser costs. There can be variations on the above and as such the rate paid will vary depending on input from farmer, with some agreements even allowing for performance bonuses. Payment rates may differ between assurance schemes with some requiring lower stocking densities (meaning less pigs can be carried) although these are for a premium market and as such may receive a higher payment rate.



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Buildings

Are my buildings suitable?

There are a number of key considerations relating to buildings

- Buildings and equipment must be well maintained and fit for purpose with floors smooth but not slippery. Building and fixtures must also be free from sharp protrusions- these can cause both injury and stress to pigs.
- Buildings must also be large enough to allow pigs to exhibit their natural behaviours, be comfortable, and allow effective ventilation both in terms of temperature and also air quality.
- Sheds must be well lit- there must be a minimum of 8 hours natural and artificial light in daylight hours and adequate light to allow inspection at any time.
- Pigs must have permanent access to sufficient clean and fresh drinking water. Finishing pigs can require at least 6 litres per day and while using non mains water can be a cheaper alternative, regular testing is required to make sure it of suitable quality.
- Design and layout is also important. Tasks such as supervision, feeding, bedding, loading and cleaning out should be undertaken as effectively as possible and more importantly without causing undue stress to the pigs.



Biosecurity

Scotland's pig producers have worked tirelessly to improve herd health over the years. This has been achieved by measures such as depopulations and co-ordinated disease monitoring.

New entrants are strongly advised to contact the Scottish Pig Disease Control Centre (contact on www.spdcc.org or 01466 7069247) to understand the requirements for health status of pigs coming in to the area so this can be matched and therefore, not jeopardise the health status of existing pig units. Ideally new entrants should contact pig producers in their area to discuss pig health and be informed of health initiatives locally, quite simply act as good neighbours.

When considering taking in pigs ask yourself a few questions.

- How far away are the nearest pigs to my farm? This may be the best potential source of pigs and be mutually beneficial to both parties.
- How easy is it to thoroughly wash out and disinfect my shed and just as importantly let them dry out properly? Disinfectants will only work if all faeces and detritus are removed with drying acting as the key step in the cleaning process.
- Are there any awkward to clean areas or areas of broken concrete? These areas can harbour disease so need to be remedied.
- Can I make feed stores and sheds free from birds and vermin? A very basic measure but birds and vermin can act as vectors for disease.
- Are the sheds next to a road and does traffic pass through the farm? Is the steading a through-road and do walkers pass nearby?
- Will effluent run out of the shed and be carried on wheels around the farm or on to a main road? Where will liquid from the pigs or washings go?
- Will I spread my muck near to other pigs and how quickly can I incorporate it? Once again birds can act as a vector and infections such as viruses can be spread via the wind

The answers to these questions (and others) impact not only on the ability of the farm to keep disease out but also the impact it has on other pig producers.

The farm needs to be a fortress from infection both internally and externally- having an understanding and awareness of best practice in terms of biosecurity has become increasingly important.

Implementing good biosecurity can be fairly simple and relatively inexpensive, simple measures such as the use of foot dips at each shed, effective cleaning processes, dedicated protective clothing and even signs showing where visitors and vehicles are permitted all help improve biosecurity.



More details can be found at:

https://www.sruc.ac.uk/download/downloads/id/2913/practical_biosecurity_for_pig_farmers.pdf

https://www.sruc.ac.uk/downloads/file/2914/green_poster_-_keep_disease_out

Stockmanship

When keeping livestock, good stockmanship skills are essential and pigs are no different.

In some cases, pig suppliers will have a fieldsman to oversee outlying units however daily supervision will still be required in most cases.

Stock keepers need an understanding and awareness of how to identify common diseases, infections and when to seek help.

This also extends into recognising the difference between normal and abnormal behaviours. Issues such as tail biting can flare up with little or no warning and need to be controlled as quickly as possible before it spreads through the pen.



Handling of pigs needs to be done in such a way as to not cause pain or stress.

This comes back to the design of buildings and consideration of loading areas at the start helps make moving pigs a less stressful and easier task for both pig and human alike as it is important that pigs are handled and moved in a calm and quiet manner.

Pigs are also clever and curious creatures- it is important that pigs are able to fulfil their essential needs in this respect. This means an enrichment material needs to be provided and straw bedding fulfils this role perfectly being manipulable, investigatable, chewable and edible but needs to be replenished. Straw also provides warmth and physical comfort.

It is important to note however that pigs can be susceptible to changes in their environment and start exhibiting unwanted behaviours such as tail biting. This can occur for a number of reasons including:

- Insufficient bedding leading to competition for clean straw
- Fluctuations in temperature from too hot to too cold and vice versa
- Changes to air quality and ventilation e.g. increased humidity, ammonia and carbon dioxide levels.
- Excess light or noise.
- Poor health
- Changes in diet or water quality
- Interruptions in normal supply of feed and/or water
- Stocking rate
- Poor pen design

Summary

Keeping pigs in straw courts can be an excellent addition to a farming business- providing a valuable income source, utilising resources more fully and offering a bonus in the form of farmyard manure.

Arrangements come in different forms to suit both parties however potential pig keepers need to be aware of the necessary requirements in terms of buildings and fittings, biosecurity and stockmanship.

Case Studies:

There are a number of case studies available, showing how new entrants have started a pig finishing enterprise. These detail the alterations that have been made to the buildings and the equipment that has been required. These are available at <https://www.fas.scot/inspirational-stories/>



For further details

Scottish Government, welfare of pigs: code of practice <https://www.gov.scot/publications/welfare-pigs-code-practice/QMS-standards/quality-assurance> <https://www.qmscotland.co.uk/pig-standards>

