



## **LAKEVIEW ORGANIC GRAIN**

Box 361, 119 Hamilton Place

Penn Yan, NY 14527 315-531-1038

[www.lakevieworganicgrain.com](http://www.lakevieworganicgrain.com)

---

### **MAKIN' BACON!**

Nearly 30 years ago, we were sitting down to May Sunday breakfast when a pickup truck drove in the driveway. The man said he'd found a piglet in his lake cottage garage and would we take it? Sure enough, there in the back of his truck was a bright-eyed round hungry 30 lb feeder pig and who knew where it came from?

Few people back into raising pigs with less preparation and more innocence then we did. After all, this was before YouTube, Google and today's plethora of small market farms. But on that May morning, there was the piglet looking up at us eagerly, so we said yes, why not?

We took that little guy down to the abandoned milkhouse in the old dairy barn, found some corn and kitchen scraps, a pail of water, and fastened a stout pallet across the door. Then, because pigs are social animals and are much happier with company, we purchased 2 more feeder pigs at the livestock auction, and voila, we were in the pig business.

Spilled grain, seed cleanings, kitchen scraps, garden weeds, grass clippings, drop apples, stale bread, and a little purchased pig feed - it proved remarkably easy to provide a daily feast for the pigs on the farm that summer. Taking feed down to the pigs became an anticipated pleasure, because no other farm animal is as responsive, interactive, playful, so utterly filled with 'personality'.

By fall, the 3 pigs were nearly 250 lbs, crowded in the milkhouse, and ready for butchering - it only takes 4-6 months to finish a feeder pig. Somehow, in one summer, we had produced A LOT of meat without hardly even trying!

We learned later that the first year was a bit of beginner's luck, it isn't always that easy, but it sure did get us hooked. What can possibly beat going into the winter with a freezer full of your own bacon, sausage, pork chops and hams? Now, nearly 30 years later, we still have pigs.

This weekend, on the Lakeview Facebook page, we're talking PIGS on the backyard scale, which - amazingly enough - may actually be possible unless you live in an apartment or an upscale suburb.

Pigs! Yes indeed - even you could raise a pig this summer!



### **THE NATURE OF A PIG.**

Pigs are smart - this is no dumb cluck or wooly-headed ewe you're dealing with, a pig's intelligence is not much different from yours. They just think about other things. Food, basic house de-construction, and socializing occupy most of that brain activity. Therefore, keep this in mind - while you are at work or in the house, they will get bored and will re-arrange the furniture. Troughs, water buckets, fences and gates must be well-planned and built/attached to withstand to this determination and strength.

**Pigs are social** - solitary confinement is considered the most punitive punishment for people, and pigs are not much different. They prefer company, especially of other pigs. If you have a facility to raise one, it isn't much more trouble to raise two, and far kinder. Your family and neighbors will appreciate the meat.

**Pigs can't sweat, and they sunburn easily** - pigs do fine in cold weather, but heat and direct summer sun can be a problem. Make sure pigs have shelter against sun, and always have drinking water. Don't be surprised if they build a muddy 'wallow' in their pen, if they can. This is nature's way of providing a cooler place for an animal that can't sweat.

**Pigs are strong, slippery, and big** - you are not going to be able to pick the pig up for long, it isn't easy to collar or rope a pig, so moving and containing the animal will need finesse and planning. You may be surprised how hard it is to get the pig on the truck to go to the butcher!

**Pigs are clean** - despite their reputation, pigs will pick one corner of their pen for their bathroom, generally opposite from where they sleep and eat, so plan accordingly and allow enough space for this. Pigs also make alot of manure and urine, and if they go outside, this will mix with mud and rain and turn to knee-deep slop. Plan their living space to allow for cleanup and management of this.

**Pigs hate electricity** - while it takes a substantial fence to contain pigs, a little electricity

goes a long way. No fur and a broad moist snout gives plenty of space for shocks. A few strands of hot poly-wire will contain even a large pig that has been trained, but some pigs are smart enough to defeat electricity by plowing soil up on the lower wire.

**Pigs don't graze, they 'pigerate'** - while a pig on pasture is a glorious sight, their joy and enthusiasm is infectious, their nature is to burrow and turn the soil, not to gently graze. That makes pigs an ideal clearing tool - they will clear underbrush and weeds rapidly, but they are very hard on a pasture. Tight rotational grazing is a must unless you want your pasture plowed.

## **FEEDING PIGS -**

Despite their reputation, today's pigs do require fairly careful attention to nutrition.

Of course you can feed pigs food scraps, garden trash, drop apples and even restaurant waste, and pigs will eagerly forage on pasture, but that alone may not be sufficient for healthy growth in modern pigs.

Heritage breeds will do better on lower quality feeds, they will grow more slowly and not reach the same final size, but will be healthy. However, modern pig breeding has selected for a fast growth type that requires the available nutrients generally obtained in a ground grain feed with added swine minerals.

Traditionally pigs were fed a wet feed or slop, with grains and food scraps mixed with sour milk, whey or water, and that does result in less waste, but wet-feeding is not practical for everyone.

Pigs require the basic nutritional building blocks - protein, carbohydrates, and fat, along with sufficient vitamins and minerals, and that is most easily obtained in a balanced grain-based pig feed that is liberally supplemented with salvage and pasture.

Carbohydrates or starches are found in all grains, but especially corn and small grains. Starches are also found in most food wastes. We know one friend who works in an Italian restaurant who brings home cooked pasta and plate scrapings each night in 5 gallon pails. The pigs love this - but cold pasta and tomato sauce alone does not make for a balanced diet, since it is usually too low in protein.

Protein is found in seeds of legumes, such as peas and soybeans, and in some other grains such as flax and sunflower. A good balanced pig grower feed is generally about 15-17% protein, and uses a significant amount of protein grains. Meat byproducts and waste, or milk/whey are also great pig protein sources if you have access to them

Pigs need a higher level of lysine than other meat animals. Lysine is an amino acid found in animal protein and some grains such as barley, but is deficient in most grains. Unless you are feeding meat or milk waste, you will probably need to make sure that the swine mineral mix in your pig feed contains sufficient lysine.

Vitamin and mineral deficiencies show up quickly in pigs because they grow so fast. These are easiest obtained in a balanced form in a good swine mineral mix, but they can

get also tasty and valuable vitamins and minerals in pasture, waste vegetables, weeds, and fruit, and an occasional bale of delicious - and SO much fun to play with - hay.

## **HOUSING PIGS**

Perhaps the best way to identify key factors of pig housing is to learn from some of our experiences.

1. First attempt - unused milkhouse on the old dairy barn with a pallet fastened across door.

PROs - cement floor & cement walls (so pigs can't dig under), about 10 ft x 12 ft sheltered space with reasonably good ventilation.

CONs - no outdoor access, hard to get in to feed and water, hard to clean out manure, too snug for 3 adult full-size pigs.

2. Second attempt - milkhouse open to poly-wired section of dry stream and scrubby woods.

PROs - more space, outdoor access, feeding and watering outside easier except in rain, most manure deposited outside, useful clearing of scrubby hard-to-maintain area and great 'expression of pig nature' rooting in woods.

CONs - the poly-wire in weedy/wet areas shorted out and didn't contain the pigs well resulting in repeated jailbreaks. Amazingly difficult to catch, handle and load pigs.

Concerns about water quality in stream and erosion where heavy pig rooting occurred.

3. Third attempt - poured cement pad outside milkhouse with frost-free dug-in waterer, steel hog panels defining and securing outdoor area.

PROs - much more orderly handling, easy feeding and year-round watering, sufficient outdoor space but no more jailbreaks, manure cleanup with loader, can drive livestock trailer up to pen and easily load pigs. With the frost-free waterer, this is now 4-season and large enough to allow partitioning for a deep-bedded farrowing/co-mothering area for several sows and litters.

CONs - the pigs have good outdoor access, but this would not meet USDA organic requirements because there is no actual soil access. No longer adjacent to sufficient pasture area for adequate rotation grazing.

In planning a facility, all of these factors matter. Because we raise heritage breeds that have enough wild in them to make it feasible they could adapt as feral pigs, it is very important we contain them in a way that prevents escape - wild boar is not something to take lightly. We now compromise by carrying the greens to the pigs, rather than letting them forage.

It is all part of being both a good pig servant and an environmental steward - and being practical because, amazingly enough, we are now 30 years older than when we started this pig experiment!

**To certify or not to certify?** That decision is both practical and philosophical, but not always for the reasons you might guess.

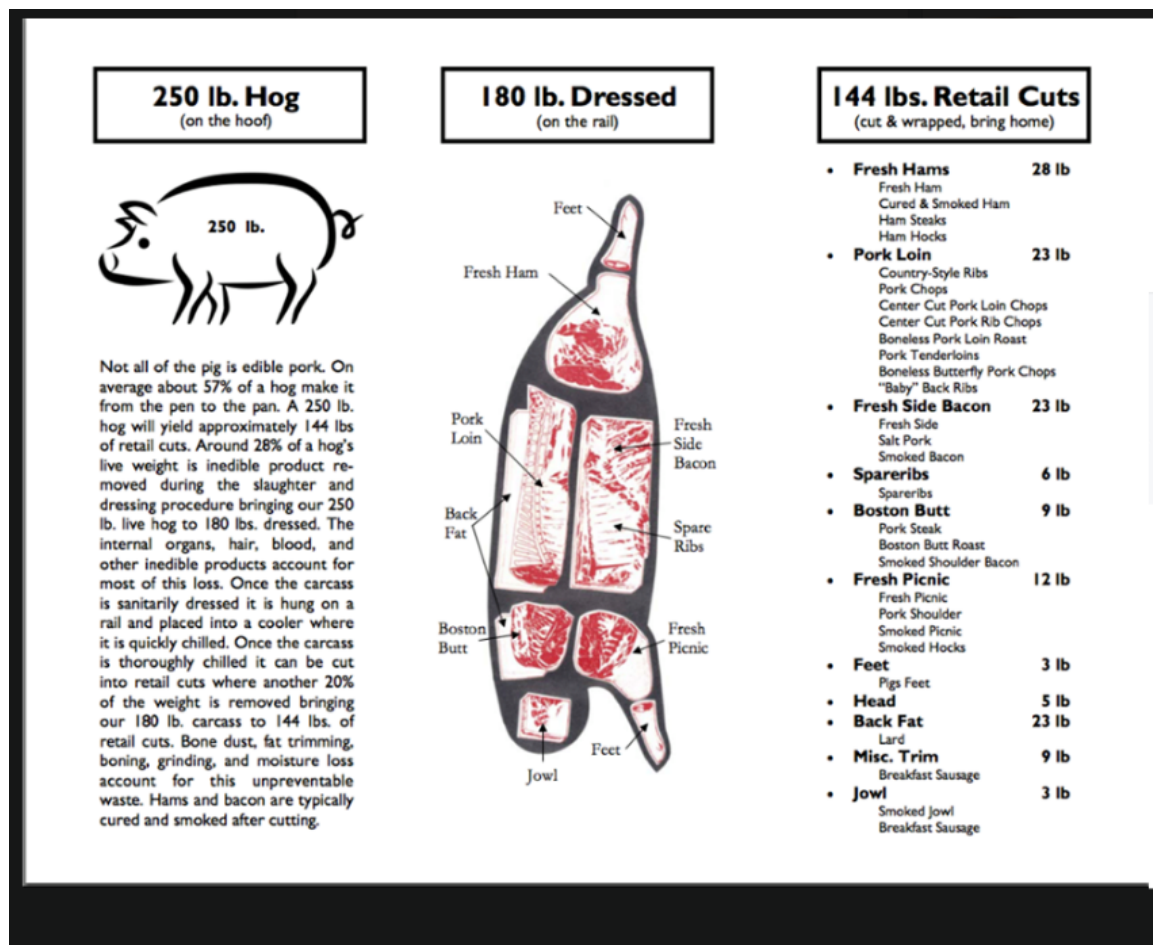
We have been organic farmers for over 25 years. We feed our pigs organic feed, and handle them mostly according to the USDA National Organic Standards requirements,

but we don't certify them. Our market knows what we are doing, they want healthy, slow-raised, low-stress heritage pigs fed simple ingredients, and to them, organic certification would not add extra value.

However, there is another important reason. Certifying the pigs would rule out many of the goodies they so enjoy, like drop apples, pails full of tomato peelings, that casserole that got old in the refrigerator, weeds from the garden, broken eggs, because we do not certify our orchard, our laying hens or the garden.

We definitely do feed them organic feed to avoid pesticides, antibiotics and GMO's and because we know it is made from high quality, well balanced organic ingredients. But we don't want to deny them their juicy apples!

## BUTCHERING PIGS



No matter how much we talk about how cute, smart, playful, and companionable pigs are, it is important to always remember you are raising meat.

This is not a new pet. You will give this animal the very best quality of life possible. You will be their servant, faithfully providing food and water. You will scoop smelly manure and spread dry straw. You will respectfully tend to their comfort and safety. When it

raining, or snowing, or when you are sick, tired, or want to go on vacation, you will be still be responsible for being their servant. Then you will eat them.

It is very important that you and your family go into the pig business with this firmly in mind because no other farm animal will challenge that perspective as much. To me, taking full responsibility for an animal's quality-of-life and well-being, taking responsibility for being a faithful servant, is critical to earning the privilege of bacon and pork chops.

If you don't think you can do this, then don't get a pig.