

BRINGING ON WEANERS



Kim and her team run the successful Oxford Sandy and Black Pig Group. You can find out more by joining them on Facebook, visiting their website for stock for sale or finding breeders in your area at www.oxfordsandyblackpiggroup.org or following them on twitter.



Time to get started on raising weaners for the freezer

Are you ready to bring on some weaners for the freezer? Of course you are! We read from the last issue of *The Smallholder* about putting in place all that is required for owning pigs. So, you would now have your holding number (CPH number); you have advised DEFRA that you will be keeping pigs and they have now given you your DEFRA herdmark. You have now visited breeders of your chosen breed and asked your questions to give you the confidence to begin and you have taken ideas away with you with regards to the set-up of your pig field/paddock and placed your orders for your weaners. It is worth noting at this stage, that when you placed your order for weaners from the breeder, it will be understood from the breeder that these will be weaners that will be brought on by you for the freezer. These will not be for breeding so please do not breed from stock that you have purchased for meat as this will not help the conservation of the breed and there is a reason why they are meat stock and not breeding stock.

There is nothing more rewarding than bringing on weaners for the freezer. It will teach you how to care for livestock and will encourage you to question yourself about your animal husbandry skills. As the months go by, you will be rewarded ten-fold for your efforts and receive a great deal of self-satisfaction for you and your family.

What about Feed

Feeding is something where you will find opinions vary. But please remember the amount you offer should also relate to the breed of pig, the size and age of the pig compared to the amount of grass that is available and other wild food such as acorns and apples. Also to be compared to the weather, how warm their bedding is to how much exercise is available to them.

But as a general rule of thumb:
 Piglets, approximately 1lb of pig pellets per day for every month of their age.
 Therefore; 2lb of pig pellets at two months
 3lb at three months
 4lb at four months

Then after four months 4lb a day should be sufficient, although you may find they can take 5lb a day at five months without putting on too much fat. Weaners should ideally be given food with fairly high protein levels (18%) so look out for a good grower/finisher feed. Younger pigs need a diet high in amino acids so that they can grow proportionately more muscle tissue, this is provided with more lysine in feed for younger pigs. After three months you can put the youngsters onto the adult feed that will have lower levels of protein. Adding rolled barley by cutting back on the concentrates (pig pellets) is also practised, this has helped the meat not to become too fatty in certain breeds of pigs.

In addition to the concentrates (pig pellets) you can offer your pig other foodstuffs like, grass, fruit, vegetables and fodder beet. Under DEFRA ruling pigs are NOT to be fed with anything from your kitchen. Which is a UK ban extended to the whole of the EU since 2003.

DO NOT FEED; the leaves from fodder beet as this contains oxalic acid and





large quantities should be avoided, as it is a gastric irritant. As are green potatoes, which should be avoided. Parsnips should be avoided, as they are associated with skin lesions in and around the mouth. It has been mentioned that parsnips are a cause of poor pregnancy and associated with abortion. Cow parsley should also be avoided as well as onions, leeks and peppers. And we all know that Ragwort is poisonous. For additional help pop along to the Oxford Sandy and Black Pig Group website and take advantage of the free tools and download the **"Livestock Feed – Decision Tree"**

Bringing on weaners is something to involve the whole family, it teaches children responsibility and a respect for life as well as encouraging them to question the little things through observation such as; how many times a day a pig is fed, why we use straw for bedding and ensuring that pigs are given fresh clean water everyday. Don't be surprised when they come up with a better solution for a problem than you, often a child's mind works in a more straightforward way. And we do have to grit our teeth and admit that these little minds are sometimes right.

Pork is still a hugely popular meat with the British public wanting supermarkets to stock British pork and with the added advertising TV campaign from AHDB Pork encouraging us to eat pork as a mid week meal. Smallholders have the opportunity to raise weaners, not only for themselves but venturing into selling rare and traditional breed pork to the public in a number of ways; either from their own doorstep; owning a farm shop; offering meat boxes or having a presence at farmer's markets and the attraction of low food miles and where our pork comes from is an added bonus!

Rearing your pork and especially the Oxford Sandy and Black Pig, is all about fall-off-the-bone joints, tasty bacon, juicy sausages, out of this world crackling and the wonderful world of Charcuterie. You will be proud of your



accomplishment and pat yourself on the back and say "yep i did that" and off you go to get another couple of weaners, and so it goes on.

But not everything is done with great gusto. There is trepidation when the day comes and your weaners are due to go to the abattoir: You will be anxious, you will have butterflies in your tummy and yes you may cry at the thought of what lies ahead; frantic ideas about keeping the pigs as pets go through our minds as the stomach churns. Just make sure you have everything organised the day before including the online movement form eAML2 showing that you are moving your weaners from farm to slaughter and ensure you have a copy with you. Have the trailer hooked up to your vehicle, load the weaners on the trailer where they will have their last feed. Then all that is left to do in the morning is to just jump into your vehicle and make your journey. I

have had many people tell me the story of how distressing it was that they could not get their pigs into the trailer on the morning of the move; some have even tried to ID them on the day. Not only does all this cause stress to the pigs but to you as well and it doesn't bode well for the meat if the pigs are stressed on the morning. Do everything in advance. Please ID your pigs a day or two before you go to slaughter. If you are inserting ear tags this is best done on the day you receive your weaners, this is because the ears are thinner and easier for your chosen tag, personally I prefer button tags. Your tags will show your herd mark number issued to you from DEFRA. Metal tags are also used. Slap marking can be done a day before. Too much to do on the day is not what you want for your first experience. So be prepared and work in advance.

When you arrive at the abattoir you will unload your pigs and confirm your departure details. You may perhaps then go to the butchery section and discuss your options. You will then come home, clean out your trailer and shed a tear - it's only human. Then four days or so after you have taken your pigs, you will get a call from your abattoir or butcher telling you that your meat is ready for collection. Believe me, that first taste will confirm to you "there is nothing like my own pork!"

If pigs have taught me one thing it's patience! Be calm and organised and everything will fall into place.

Did you know that Pork medallions are just as healthy as chicken breast? Both pork and chicken are naturally rich in protein. Protein helps muscle growth. This relates to pork loin and fillet medallions trimmed of visible fat and to skinless chicken breast. For delicious pork recipes visit the Love Pork website and join the OSB Rare Breed Pork Group on facebook. **TS**

Credit to: Buttle Farm, Lawn Farm, Diane Dunkley, River Croft, Heath Farm Suffolk, Martin Livall, Pig Place, Russ Gleeson, Three Locks Farm, Robert Mulliner, Chris Dodds