

PIG BREEDING - IS IT FOR YOU?

To breed or not to breed – A Question that is filled with excitement mixed with a hint of apprehension which is always healthy.

Over the last few months, we have covered various stages of keeping and bringing on pigs. We have looked at housing, bedding, water, size of land, fencing, feeding and the correct authorities to contact when embarking on keeping pigs. Reason for keeping pigs are varied from breeding, keeping pigs as pets or bringing on a couple of weaners for the freezer. But how about "Breeding".

Keeping Breeding Stock

Keeping breeding stock is a whole different ball game compared to bringing on weaners for the freezer, and it is true to say that it is a subject that fills people with excitement and has the "Awww" factor. I so often speak to many excited and enthusiastic people who have "always wanted pigs" and want to own a breeding gilt (female pig not yet given birth to piglets) or two, or may have been advised to have a sow in-pig (pregnant pig) and the reason given is so they don't have to wait to own their first little piglets. The idea of owning breeding stock may have come to you on a wonderful Summers day after watching a beautiful farming programme but this is not the way to embark on your venture. From such eagerness can come regret and sadness due to research not being carried out thoroughly.

The Oxford Sandy and Black Pig Group, inspire and encourage new pig keepers to come and visit their set-up, to enable you to see what they do and how they do things. Please also respect the bio-security measures in place when visiting your chosen smallholding as your boots will have to be clean and you will be asked to disinfect your boots in a foot dip. Breeders, regardless of pig breed, will be pleased to answer any questions you may have, show you the sows (mothers), how they are kept outside and how they are managed. If you have never kept pigs before and want to breed do not be surprised if you are advised to take two for fattening first this way you will have a feel (although not the full experience) and the dedication that is required in keeping a couple of pigs and although it is only for say four months it gives you a platform to work from where you will benefit from the knowledge of where to acquire suitable housing, what and how much to feed and what NOT to feed, having regular hands-on contact, knowing your soil type and coping with the eventualities that come



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.



from this, for example does it have good drainage if not how would you cope in the winter months as sliding around in the mud trying to feed your breeding stock is not fun for them or you. Also bedding them up and keeping them dry in their arcs is also something to consider. Maybe you have a barn to over winter them in. All these factors will help you in your decision making and what and how you do things in a Summer month will be totally different to how you do things in the Winter months. Each season will throw a different challenge to you and will test you beyond your wildest dreams.

What breeds are out there?

How will you choose? This is the exciting part, it is down to personal preference and boy there is a choice! From size, shape and colour all with their own fascinating story to tell.

There are 16 Pedigree breed of pigs established here in the UK. Eleven of which are recognised with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) and on their Watchlist categorised as Endangered (100-200 breeding sows), Vulnerable (200-300 breeding sows) and At Risk (300-500 breeding sows). The RBST recognises breeds with six generation pedigree or with 40 years breed history. Then there are the breeds who are registered with the British Pig Association whereby the herd books of 14 breeds of pedigree pigs are kept. The British Lop retains its own herd book and is one of the breeds that is classed as Endangered with the RBST. The Kune Kune also retains its own herd book and is a popular small breed pig.

THE BREEDS ARE

Berkshire, British Lop, British Saddleback, Duroc, Gloucestershire Old Spot, Hampshire, Kunekune, Landrace, Large Black, Large White, Mangalitzka, Middle White, Oxford Sandy and Black, Pietrain, Tamworth, Welsh

Putting your best trotter forward

First and foremost, purchase young breeding stock which will enable you to grow with your breeding gilts or boar this way they will grow to know you and you will grow to know them. They will interact with your voice and your body language as you will with theirs. Watching them grow and knowing their quirky little ways and their off days will enable you to be patient, to question your judgements and at the same time realising theirs and your limitations. This is important. Please remember when you place your order for a pedigree breeding pig be patient and be clear to the breeder that you wish to become a pedigree breeder and wish to own a breeding gilt/boar. DO NOT breed from weaners that you have purchased for the freezer. There is a reason why these pigs are sold for meat. Breeding stock are of far superior quality to those that are sold as meat. Breeding stock meet the respective breed standard. They are of good shape, bone structure, have a good number of even and parallel teats (underline), walk well and high on their tip toes (referred to as "walking high on their pasterns), no buckled or knock knees, no dip in their backs (potentially

causes problem when being served by a boar - male pig). To add to this, certain breeds have certain characteristics which you will find when you research further on your chosen breed.

So which breed will you choose – “it’s a box of chocolates!”

OXFORD SANDY AND BLACK



The Oxford Sandy and Black is a wonderful, gracious, pleasing pig with an excellent temperament (both in the sows and the boars). Litter sizes can vary from 8 to 16. Meat quality is exceptional being a multi-purpose producer of fall-off-the-bone joints, tasty bacon, juicy sausages, out of this world crackling and a producer of exquisite charcuterie as our Patron, Marco Pierre-White knows only too well.

The breed is classed as ‘Category 4’ with the RBST which is “At Risk”. Currently having only 495 breeding sows and 128 breeding boars, which includes the UK, Ireland and The Netherlands. We have 13 sow bloodlines and 4 boar bloodlines. So as you can see they are beautiful on the outside as they are on the inside. Visit the Oxford Sandy and Black Pig Group website or join us on Facebook, twitter (oxfordpig) or instagram (OSBPigGroup) E: Hello@oxfordsandyblackpiggroup.org for further support and knowledge.

LARGE BLACK



With lop ears and a long deep body, the Large Black is Britain’s only all black pig. One of this country’s oldest pig breeds, the Large Black had its origins in the Old English Hog of the 16th and 17th centuries. Their hardiness and ability to withstand sunburn made the Large Black suitable for a wide variety of climatic conditions. By 1935 they had been exported to well over 30 countries world-wide. In 1949 the Large Black Pig Society merged with the National Pig Breeders Association, later renamed the British Pig Association (BPA) where our herdbook is now retained.

The breed conformation requires the pig to have a minimum of 12 sound teats, lop ears and be all black. With regards to meat quality, the Large Black is very much appreciated for its tasty succulent meat and eating qualities. It is superb as pork but excels when traditionally cured as bacon, and doesn’t have black skin!

There are 23 sow lines and 6 boar lines. The Large Black remains on the Rare Breed Survival Trust’s endangered list. There are 318 registered sows in the UK, down from 334 in 2018. Registered boars in 2019 are 75, down from 79 in 2018. The ‘official’ data for average litter size is 8.56 but we have achieved an average litter size of 9.44.

Here at Millaton Farm, nestled on the foot of Dartmoor in Devon, we are proud to have the Millaton Herd of Pedigree Large Blacks. We currently have an Attempt boar, 1 of only 2 in the South West. We have 4 sows, a Gold Vase, Julia, Skylark and Sunshine. Our Gold Vase and Julia are the only ones in the South West. We are also looking forward to getting a Golden Harvest gilt from top breeder Maria Naylor in the summer. Whilst we have only been breeding Large Blacks for a year, we have had 84 piglets born and have selected 10 gilts and 3 boars to be registered pedigree for future breeding. Want to learn more? Contact Andy Lawrence & Adam Whitaker, Millaton Smallholding E: millatonsmallholding@outlook.com

BRITISH LOP

The British Lop pig has its origins in the South West of England where for many years it was ‘the’ pig to be found on farms hidden away in Devon and Cornwall. Unfortunately, being hidden away is part of the reason that this wonderful, docile and easily managed animal has become so rare, with the number of sows down below 200!

When we decided to set up the Laird breeding herd of free range Lops it was to boost their numbers, something helped by the excellent mothers having good



size litters (one of our sows regularly produces litters of twenty piglets) and at the end of the day to produce outstanding meat. As I mention above, Lops prove easy to manage, partly because their huge ears result in them being unaware of what is going on beyond their immediate surroundings and this is a bonus for any pig keeper as it avoids those evening phone calls from irate neighbours!

The British Lops are listed with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust and is listed as Category 2 which is classed as Endangered.

For information about the Laird herd of British Lop pigs contact lairdandrose@gmail.com

TAMWORTH



A traditional breed with a very distinctive ginger coat, (thick in winter and lighter in summer) that keeps them warm in winter and protects them from sunburn in the summer. They should have erect pointed ears and an alert nature. A hardy breed that lend themselves to colder climates and outdoor living, they are natural rooters and foragers. The breed is arguably the oldest British pig breed and as such is slower maturing. A healthy breeding sow should reach around 260kg and a breeding boar around 320kg. The breed is known to have an average litter size of 7 but Jacqueline our sow, or JC as she is affectionately known has litters of about 13.

Classed as ‘vulnerable’ with the Rare Breed Survival Trust, with less than 300 breeding registered sows they

are historically known as the 'bacon pig'. However, we find that the meat makes extremely good all round eating compared to other breeds we tried raising from weaners for meat when we started out. In fact having experimented with some crossing for meat purposes we found that crossed with an Oxford Sandy and Black the Tamworth produces an excellent dark, flavoursome meat.

I choose to keep the breed as they have such a lovely temperament and love nothing more than a good scratch and a fuss made of them, they are very vocal and like to communicate with you as soon as they see you. They are easy to work with and are excellent mothers that share the workload of motherhood in an amazing nanny system when allowed to roam together as our sows do. If you wish to know more then contact Angela Peters, E: Anjpeters@icloud.com T: 07928 330151

GLOUCESTERSHIRE OLD SPOT



We have kept 4 - 6 Gloucestershire Old Spot pigs per year, for the last 6 years in our orchard in Kent, which is quite fitting as they are known as the original 'orchard pig'.

The Gloucestershire Old Spots pig is a hardy breed living quite happily outside all year round, they are very gentle, friendly and intelligent, they love playing and are very inquisitive.

The Gloucestershire Old Spots Pig Breeders' Club was established in 1990 and the current patron is HRH Princess Royal, Princess Anne who also keeps GOS pigs.

Before 1913 no other pedigree spotted breed was recorded, which is why today's Gloucestershire Old Spot pig is recognised as the oldest pig breed in the world. The RBST have the breed listed as 'At risk' which represents only 300 to 500 breeding sows.

The Gloucestershire Old Spot is a large, good quality meaty animal with a broad, deep body and large hams. Their white coat has large clearly defined black spots. Their legs and feet should be strong and straight, their ears should lop

over covering their faces down to their noses. The sows should have at least 14 well placed teats, we have had litters of between 9 and 14 piglets from our sows, who have all been extremely good mum's.

Want to know more then please contact Nathan Hayward, Albion Pigs T: 07427 584 944 E: haywards10@yahoo.com

KUNEKUNE



The Kunekune is a medium sized grazing pig which was originally bred by the Maori people of New Zealand for its meat but more amazingly for its fat (Lard). Litter Sizes range from anything from 2 to 12 piglets and can be any colouration and coat pattern not necessarily imaging or replications of their parents, and there are rarely 2 piglets in a litter that are the same. Often referred to as the 'Jack Russell' of the pig world due to size.

The one thing that I truly believe sets them out from the other pig breeds is its temperament and with this in mind is what makes them a fascinating and ever popular Small Holders Pig. The Breed is lucky enough to have its own Society which also controls its own Herd Book, with a healthy membership of 475, and an average of 100-120 litter notifications per year and 330-350 pedigree registrations resulting in a healthy UK population. Do contact Kevin Kersley, Chairman British Kune Kune Pig Society (BKKPS) - Pencommins Pigs E: kevinkersley@aol.com T: 07702 781434

MANGALITZA



Mangalitza first came to the UK in 2006, Initially there were 3 boar lines and 7 female lines.

There were 3 colours, Red (bright ginger) Blonde (platinum blonde) and Swallow Belly (like a swallow, Black on back and blonde underside). The colours were not just for aesthetics, each colour produces a different carcass. Red, a deep ruby tighter grained meat with much less fat than the blonde and swallow belly. Blonde, a deep ruby meat, much fatter carcass and swallow belly, a ruby red meat the carcass has the fat of the blonde but with intense marbling. They are nicknamed the wagyu pig!

Through breeding all colours together to create the carcasses my clients require we have pigs of all colours here which is: grey, red swallow belly, gold, black.

The meat very ruby in colour has a unique flavour of its own, more akin to beef than pork.

Currently in the UK there are only 19 breeders with 57 sows with progeny, 30 without progeny and 29 boars.

When looking for breeding stock rather than concentrating your choice on the "pretty colours available" it is more important that the Mangalitza should carry these specific traits. An easy way to remember them is T.T.F.N.S:-

- T - Trotters- must be solid black, no pink or other colour
 - T - Tassel- a back tassel at the end of the tail
 - F - Fleck - The Wellman Fleck, A light coloured area at the lower base of the ear
 - N - Nipples- black and 5 or 6 pairs. No odd numbers
 - S - Snout- black, no pink spots
- To talk more about this incredible breed contact Lisa Hodgson, Otterburn Mangalitza T: 07808 721 293 E: otterburn-mangalitza@hotmail.co.uk

Worth remembering

Please, when looking to breed it is important if you can see the owners of your potential breeding stock. We are all very accommodating and if one cannot help then we will surely put you in touch with someone who can. You may be too far from some of us just to pop in. But having said this it is worth travelling for good breeding stock. It helps with the geographical spread of the bloodlines and genetics of the breed. It is also worth seeing a couple of us pig breeders so you can get an idea of how one persons idea differ from the other and how the combination of all the breeders ideas you have seen can work for you. **TS**

Credits: Albion Pigs, Kim Brook, Laird & Rose, Kevin Kerslake, Andy Lawrence & Adam Whitaker, Lisa Hodgson, Angela Peters, Jonathan Furber, Lillie Smith