

Pasture Pork — Breed Selection

When deciding what swine breed to raise on your farm, consider several things, including:

- **What does the market want?** If your buyer wants smaller cuts of meat with more fat, a heritage breed may fit that bill. If the people you sell to want lean, large pork cuts, there are other breeds that would satisfy their needs. If you are selling breeding stock, then you need to find out what breeding stock is popular in your market area.
- **What breeds can you find?** Some breeds are harder to find than others. The ones that are harder to find are often more expensive.
- **What resources do you have?** Some heritage breeds may be less expensive to raise because they are smaller than other breeds. These breeds may eat less and need less space and smaller housing.

Generally, pigs are bred either for good mothering ability and litter sizes or good growth and carcass traits. The following are examples of different breeds and how they are used:

Maternal breeds known mostly for mothering, milk and litter size are usually white in color. Examples include Yorkshire, Landrace, Chester White and Large White.

Terminal or carcass breeds known mostly for fast growth, more meat and less fat are usually not white. Examples include Berkshire, Hampshire, Duroc, Spots and Poland China. Darker colored pigs may get hotter in the summer, but white pigs sunburn, so some producers choose to use hogs with a reddish color.

Some heritage breeds thought to do well in an outdoor system and said to have good mothering and foraging abilities include Ossabaw, Old Spot, Large Black and Tamworth.

Crossbreeding, or the mating of different breeds, will result in pigs with good traits from each of the breeds. However, if too many different breeds are used, there is no benefit of crossbreeding.

No matter what breed is used in a production system, care should be taken to only use animals with good leg/body structure, at least 10 correctly formed teats (or 12 if choosing a breed that has large litter sizes), and properly formed external sex organs.

Animals kept for breeding should also be the ones that have performed well, so it is important to keep good records of how many pigs are born and raised from each sow and how well her pigs grow

Your county Cooperative Extension Center can provide more information on breeds of pigs and selection of breeding stock.

www.ces.ncsu.edu/local-county-center/



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