

THE ABCs OF PORK PRODUCTION

Antibiotics – Even pigs get sick sometimes and require medicine to recover. When illness threatens the health of a pig, antibiotics are used. The industry’s “Take Care, Use Antibiotics Responsibly” program helps ensure producers use these medicines only when necessary.

Animal Well-Being – This term describes the overall status of an animal. Pork producers use best management practices to ensure animals are raised in a responsible manner and their needs are met. These practices include providing proper housing, nutrition, protecting the health of animals, and making sure they are handled humanely. Ensuring the well-being of animals not only helps pork producers efficiently raise animals to market weight, but it is the right thing to do.

Artificial Insemination – A practice commonly used in the swine industry where a catheter (tube) is inserted into the uterus through the cervix to deposit a sperm sample in order to achieve fertilization/pregnancy.

Bacon – A staple of the American breakfast and a popular ingredient of many sandwiches and entrees, bacon is cured or smoked meat from the pig’s belly and sides.

Barrow – a male hog that has been castrated.

Best Management Practices – Most professions have a set of generally agreed upon procedures that ensure effective, consistent, and/or safe completion of tasks or services. In the pork industry, best management practices are procedures producers follow to help them raise nutritious and lean pork, including the observation of each pig each day to ensure its well-being.

Biosecurity – In animal production, illnesses are easily spread from herd to herd. To help prevent this, pork producers institute a strict biosecurity program that isolates their animals, controls human contact, prevents contact with other animals from outside the operation, and provides for complete sanitation of each facility. Many times this requires one to shower going to a facility and again when leaving.

Boar – A boar is an intact adult male pig, usually used for breeding purposes.

Breed - Common pig breeds include Poland China, Berkshire, Hampshire, Spot, Chester White, Yorkshire, Landrace, and Duroc.

By-products – These are items made from the pig that are secondary to the meat. Medicine, insulin, heart valves, gelatin, glue, lipstick, and buttons are just a few of the many by-products that come from pigs.

Contract Production/Grower – This is a method of production that allows producers to be involved in pork production at a reduced risk. A “contractor” raises pigs during one or more phases of production for another producer, receiving an agreed upon fee. While the contractor does not own the pigs, he or she owns the land and buildings where the pigs are raised and provides all the labor and most other services necessary.

Environmental Stewardship – It is often said that farmers are the original conservationists. Their livelihoods depend on the land they own. Pork producers are important members of the communities where they live and use responsible production practices to protect the land and water for future generations.

Farrowing – This refers to the birthing of piglets.

Farrowing Stall – A farrowing stall is a pen for the sow and piglets. This type of pen helps protect piglets from injury, allows for individual care of the sow and piglets, and give the piglets an area to stay warm while the sow can stay cooler.

Farrow-to-Finish – A farrow-to-finish operation is one that includes all production and growth phases (from birth to market) at one farm.

Feed – This is what all livestock eat. A pig’s diet changes as it grows, but corn, wheat, soybeans, trace minerals, and micronutrients are commonly fed. Pigs also receive an ample supply of fresh water.

Feeder Pig – A feeder pig is between the stages of weaning and finishing. Feeder pigs start out at about 50 pounds and are considered a feeder pig until they reach about 150 pounds.



Feeder-to-Finish – The phase of production after the nursery phase. Pigs come in at about 50 lbs. and grow until they reach market weight.

Finishing Barn – This is where pigs go after the nursery phase and remain until they reach market weight.

Gestation – The period of time when a sow is pregnant, lasting approximately 114 days.

Gestation Stall – A gestation stall is a form of individual housing for sows during pregnancy. This allows each sow to be fed and cared for individually and also prevents aggressive behaviors seen when multiple sows are together.

Gilt – This term refers to a female pig that has not yet had a litter of pigs.

Ham – The cut of meat that comes from the hind leg of a pig.

Hog – A common term for a pig.

Litter – Refers to all pigs born at one time to a sow. There are usually 8-14 piglets in each litter.

Loin – One of the tastiest cuts of pork, the loin is located along the back between the pig's shoulder and hind leg.

Market Weight – The weight pigs reach before being sold, usually between 240-280 pounds.

Market Price – The price a producer receives for each pound of pork raised.

Mechanical Ventilation – A system that uses mechanical means, such as fans, to pull air through a facility.

Natural Ventilation – A system designed to use Mother Nature (wind) to pull air through a facility.

Nursery – The production phase from weaning until pigs enter the feeder-to-finish phase.

Operation – Another word for a pig farm.

Pen – The area within a production facility where pigs are raised together. The number of pigs per pen depends on their size and phase of production.

Piglet – This term is used for pigs from birth until weaning.

Pit – A solid concrete area under the pig barn, usually 8 or 10 feet deep, that safely holds manure until it is ready to be pumped out. This ensures that no manure leaves the barn unless a farmer is removing it.

Pork Producer – Another word for a pig farmer.

Pork Quality Assurance (PQA) – PQA is a program for both youth and adult pork producers who are committed to ensuring that U.S. pork products are high-quality and safe and that their animals are cared for in a way that ensures their well-being.

Sow – Females used for breeding are considered sows after they farrow their first litter.

Withdrawal Period – The period of time between when an antibiotic is given until it is safe for that animal to enter the food supply. Every antibiotic has its own withdrawal period and is regulated by the FDA.

Weaning – The process of transferring young pigs from their mother and to the nursery. Most pigs are ready for weaning after three to four weeks.

