

Workshop Title: Animal Management

Speaker(s) & their titles: Sébastien Angers, Les Viandes Rheintal (QC)

Executive Summary

Pastured pork requires a process of trial and error. Sanitation and hygiene is one of the biggest challenges and having a good barn set up and cleaning routine is paramount. Decisions of when to put your animals on pasture and take them off help with animal nutrition and pasture longevity and health.

Detailed Notes:

Sébastien Angers runs Les Viandes Rheintal, an organic livestock operation, growing their own feed for their pastured pork, grass-fed beef near Trois Rivieres, Quebec. The farm belonged to the father of his partner Guylaine.

They sell fresh meat and smoked meat as well.

The animals have access to pasture for 6 months, fed only certified organic feed that they grow: 200 acres of corn, soya, grains and pasture. They grow all the feed they require for their operation.

The process for efficient organic pastured pork has been refined through a process of trial and error. The pigs have a tendency to dig if there is not enough pasture so it is important to do the calculations and move the pigs before they start digging. This ensures health and longevity of a pasture. Ideally animals are moved off when the pasture is grazed down to 10cm.

The cows and pigs are rotated to control parasite/pest populations.

For pastures, a mix of wheat, oats, barley and peas is planted with a hay mix underseeded. The pigs graze the cereal mix in the milk stage, ensuring they get to it before it gets overgrown and then are moved off, whereupon the hay seed continues to establish. The hay mix includes Rye grass, tall fescue, white clover and an Italian grass.

It is important that pigs have a pond because they use mud as sunscreen. Without ponds, you can lose 50% yield.

The fields have been fenced to allow intensive rotation of the fields. Pigs begin by wallowing in the mud to apply their sunscreen, then they go out to graze. They eat 5am-9am, 4pm-dusk but rarely in the afternoon.

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Sébastien breeds his own pigs and has changed the barn set up to make birthing and nursing more sanitary. This is one of the greatest challenges to do organically since antibiotics are not allowed.

Stalls are designed like conventional operations with perforated metal that allows you to muck out from underneath. This allows more frequent and thorough cleansing and flaming and results in better air quality as well. Coccidiosis loves to stick to concrete and so needs to be controlled with flaming. Five sows birth piglets at the same time using the swedish model.

Barn temperature is regulated 18-20C with doors open in the summer with automatic ventilation systems.

Barn doors are opened and cleaned every week efficiently with a bobcat. Bobcats are absolutely necessary for raising animals organically since sanitation is so important. During cleaning, pigs are moved into a small partitioned area in the barn for two hours. A richer feed formula is placed inside a small structure in the barn to exclude bigger pigs but allow piglets in.

Sows are fed with individual cages so individuals can be separated if they need to move a sow to the maternity ward.

4-5 bales of haylage per week are provided to the sows.

Genetics:

F1 hybrid - landrace and yorkshire - good on pasture

Male: tamworth berkshire - berkshire has more marbling for charcuterie

He keeps some purebred berkshire red wattle, (which have smaller broods : 16-18 piglets per year compared to 20-22 per year) to cross breed

Red wattle is a rare breed that is good for pasture

He artificially inseminates for more consistency and to prevent epigenetic weakness.

Natural insemination presents a risk of transferring uterus infection between females.

Males are good for one copulation per day, if you have 5-6 sows in heat same day, it's not enough

Nonetheless, males are for back up and helps the sows get more in heat.

Sébastien also constructed piglet outdoor feeders that protect them. They cost \$500 to make and work well June-September for farm visitors to see as well. Afterwards piglets are all kept indoors.

Biosecurity is hugely important because no antibiotics

So some outdoor piglet raising for visitors to see

Use 200ft electric fence for 50ft squared

Computer controlled mill and mixer for making feed has been a valuable investment.

Mixes:

Lactation sows: 50% mixed grain, corn 30%, soy 20%

Weaning pigs: mixed 40%, soy 20%, corn 20%, oats 5%, supplements 5%

Finished pigs: mixed 70%, corn 30% and hay

Cayenne pepper for digestive health
Uses diatomaceous earth

Adding 20 percent soy is more expensive but gives 20 percent for weaning pigs to get pigs up to weight at first or it's hard to catch up, 1:1 feed to weight gain ratio at weaning stage

Weaning is also a challenge to do organically because during this time, pigs have to develop their own immune systems which adds stress.

Risks are salmonella, viruses, diarrhea

Weaning at 5-6 weeks is better for piglets but weakens the sow, meaning that 2-3 menstruations have to be skipped before they are in condition to be impregnated again.

Beef

For organic beef, healthy forage and pasture is important.

Pasture seeded at 35 k/ha (double the standard) of an alfalfa-timothy mix. The alfalfa fixes N well but requires good management to maximise the nutrition. The older alfalfa gets, the less energy is present.

In Quebec, the best time to cut or graze is right before flowering is highest, June 3, which gives the highest protein content (milk stage). The ideal height is 18-24 inches.

Hay is cut to round bales. Cows are fed third cut hay first, then second cut and then finished on first cut. Feeding station is spacious so there is limited competition. Cows are always given access to barn for water and hay.