

Workshop Title: Pigs – What Works For Me

Speaker(s) & their titles: Elwood Quinn & Pam Heath, Rare Breeds Canada

Executive Summary:

This workshop focused on husbandry practices in raising pigs, looking especially at the first week of life.

Detailed Notes:

How do you prevent a sow from crushing newborn piglets when she lays down? Elwood spoke about a few different methods. He likes them separated, but not completely in different pens. Elwood tries to keep the litter away from sow as much time as possible during their first week of life. Create space within the pen that only piglets can access. You can use a heat lamp to attract them to the safe area. He has seen different set-ups. He also likes to give the piglets a little straw for the first 2-3 days so they don't nest. And he gets up in the night to give them milk from mom.

Harry Stoddart uses deep straw and doesn't try to separate piglets from mom. You need to find what works for you!

Elwood takes the "needle teeth" out at birth otherwise they bite mom. This is different from pink pigs because the different breeds have different personalities. You want mom to have 12 long tits with none inverted. The number of healthy big tits will be the number of surviving piglets. Piglets stay on same tit for their whole life.

Overfeeding is a common problem. You can feed them anything, but make sure they get grain. They need the protein – alfalfa hay is a source – otherwise they don't finish fast enough. Sod can be used as an iron source. Joel Salatin writes of feeding them horse or cow manure.

Tamworths are the toughest pig around. They are compatible with other animals, and other breeds within same species. But make sure they don't destroy pasture by routing. Put rings in to prevent them from routing.

Fresh semen is not available for rare breeds.

Question: What is the best time of year for farrowing?

Answer: They aim for spring, because that's when they can sell them. It can be at any time of year. You want to keep that mother producing. Keep baby pigs in mom as much as possible. Keep the gals lean to keep them breedable.

Question: How do you handle parasites?

Answer: We worm. Apparently diatomaceous earth, garlic, rosemary can also work.

Question: When do you castrate?

Answer: Castration happens at 3-4 days. Keep boars separate from sows most of the time. Some people don't castrate and have no problems.

Question: What are some sources for non-GMO food?

Answer: It's difficult to do. No GMO barley or wheat, so search for that. A workshop participant brings it in from Ontario – Watermill Feeds.

Question: Is it difficult to get an abattoir to take pasture-raised animals?

Answer: They take it if you are persistent, but generally they don't like to handle it.