

# *Pasture raising the Mangalitsa pig*

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*Wilhelm W. Kohl & Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche*

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## - INTRODUCTION -

Ever since the first Mangalitsa arrived on U.S. shores in 2007, the topic of how to best free range them and feed them on pasture has been a hot one.

Going back in history, you will find that pasture raised hogs have been a mainstay of the American diet ever since the Spanish conquistadors brought the first pigs with them in the early 16th century. They simply released the pigs into the wild – and voila, they had a steady supply of pork within a few years. Other European immigrants did no different, pasturing pigs from coast to coast, masting them in the fall on the bountiful nut drop the huge American forests, especially chestnuts, provided in abundance.

Later on, farmers would drive their hogs into the harvested field to glean whatever part of the crop had been missed, let them clean up orchards in the fall, where they not only get the fallen fruit, but a lot of the rodents hiding there as well. Pigs have an excellent sense of smell, and as omnivores, will dig up tasty morsels of all types from the ground, rejuvenating the land in the process.

Unfortunately, with the change in land use patterns and much more intensive farming practices starting the later half on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the pig industry changed. From outdoor pastures, the pigs were moved to confinement barns, the farrowing crate became standard, and feed rations were scientifically designed to provide the ideal growth rations. Operating pig farms had to become bigger and bigger to make a profit providing ever more cheap pork, and so did the infamous manure lagoons. Factory farming at its best – horrific conditions for the animals as a consequence.

Much of the local knowledge of pasture raising pigs, acquired over generations, and passed down in families and communities, was lost rather rapidly. The traditional outdoor system was quickly looked upon as archaic, became consigned to agricultural past, just like the horse & buggy when the automobile took over. The all important local knowledge of how pigs interact with nature in a particular area in many cases was lost for good. Call it the dark days.



## - CHANGING A BROKEN SYSTEM -

*W*hile the commercial pork industry has been extremely secretive about its practices, and it is virtually impossible to visit any of the large factory farms for “BIOSECURITY” reasons, nothing remains a secret forever. The pork advertised as “THE OTHER WHITE MEAT” in reality created a desire for a more traditional, flavorful, darker red meat type pork, and that is the pasture raised type.

Fortunately, traditional old line breeds, kept alive over the years by a few enthusiast all over the USA and Europe, hardier and of course still much more adapted to pasture style animal husbandry, are still available, and now in demand again.

And then the Mangalitsa pig, most closely associated with the traditional pasture style system in Europe, became available in the USA.

The Mangalitsa pig truly reignited demand for sustainably raised, all natural pastured pork, and chefs from all over the USA suddenly became great fans and advocates of this more flavorful pork. Free range, no herbicides or pesticides, raised without antibiotics, free of genetic engineering, GMO free feed, no added hormone use are the tag lines of today.



The potential customer base for this kind of pork is substantial in every part of the country, and without any question, will keep on expanding for years to come. More and more people are starting to believe that the way pigs are raised should reflect more natural conditions. A pig's natural habitat is not an air conditioned, concrete building floor, but pasture with enough space to exercise their muscles on a regular basis. Edges of woodlands provide shade, and with enough space and frequent rotation from pasture to pasture, you greatly reduce the cycles of common fetal parasites. There also is the additional benefit of the pigs spreading their own manure evenly over the land, not creating the smelly waste ponds part of the commercial hog industry.



Just like grass fed cattle provide a more flavorful beef, so do pastured pigs provide more flavorful pork, higher in the omega-3 fatty acids needed by the human body. A unique opportunity for small scale farmers to compete with the industrial giants, but as diversified a market as possible is essential to the success of your operation.



## - PASTURE RAISING RECOMMENDATIONS -

*I*t is quite easy and relatively inexpensive to get started in pasture raising pigs, and anybody with a few acres, and some spare time on their hands can certainly do it. But a few points should be considered.



1) While it is true that wild boars perfectly well survive without any assistance from humans, and feral swine in the more moderate climatic zones in the USA, have become a big problem, one has to realize that they are roaming unlimited space. In other words, they do not need to contend with fences limiting their space, and as a result, the amount of food source potentially available.

*T*hat of course is not true for any domestically raised, pastured pig. Anybody raising pigs in a farm setting, has to be aware of such imposed, natural space limitations.



2) Pigs love to graze when there is fresh grass and other vegetation available, but it is especially the Mangalitsa that will forage at any time, even when regular feed is available at preset times.

They dig for grubs, roots and forage on most types of grasses and legumes, with one of the favorite plants being the much despised pigweed. But even under the best of circumstances, domestic pigs need supplemental feed to balance their diet and deliver the high quality pork so much in demand.





*A* recent experiment on an island of around 100 acres near Almere, Holland, where Barbara Meyer to Altenschildesche, in cooperation with the local government, released 5 Mangalitsas for 7 months into the wild, proved the point. Even though the conditions concerning the available vegetation were good throughout their stay, they simply could not find enough protein to produce a quality slaughter animal without putting them on additional feed for 90 days.



3) All pigs love to dig, and recent trends of raising pigs in forest type settings, especially on hill sides, have created huge problems. Depending on the number of pigs per acre, and we recommend only 2 pigs per acre even in open pasture land with moderate rainfall, a wooded area can quickly become a barren piece of ground. Pigs will dig around the roots of every single tree, rub against the trunks of the trees, chew on the bark, create wallows at the base of the trees and root aggressively if not enough nutrients, speak feed, is available.



*B*ecause the vegetation in mature woodlands is generally quite limited, and the forest floor is covered just about exclusively with leaf litter, once this surface structure is degraded, any significant rainfall will cause severe problems. Once a hillside starts eroding, and I have seen it happen from New Jersey to California, it is virtually impossible to restore. But as mentioned already, forest edges adjacent to open pastures, if not put under too much pressure, are a perfect environment to include.

4) Availability of shelter is of utmost importance in properly pasture raising pigs, so planning ahead concerning location of temporary or permanent installations is recommended. Mangalitsa pigs have no problem staying outdoors even under extremely low temperatures, but they do need protection from the wind in these severe conditions. Portable steel huts can provide excellent shelters, especially if they are fixed over a plywood bottoms, and are filled with plenty of straw.





*We* have installed more permanent, solid wooden structures with posts every 8 feet, and partially backfilled on the outside. We do this not only to provide shelter for the pigs, but also for eye appeal of the pastures on the farm in general. We not only allow visitors at our farm, but we encourage them, as very few city dwellers have ever seen live pigs, and visiting a farm can be very important in building customer relationships.



5) Water is as important for pigs as any other livestock, and a usable natural source, like a spring or a pond can be of great help in planning larger pastures. A main concern of course has to be a sustainable source for the winter, when above ground lines can freeze within hours and stay that way for weeks at a time.



*A*nd remember, pigs do need mud to wallow in to keep cool. So they will dig, and generally close to their source of water.



6) One more point is concerning supervision. Believe me, any site you chose, no matter how good the fence, and no matter how well you feed them, regular oversight of any pasture, is highly recommended. Pigs have a lot of time on their hand – and not sure how it works, but it seems the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. In addition, it allows you to check for sick or injured animals, and prompt action can potentially save you a lot of money by reducing your losses in animals and vet bills.





*P*asturing pigs, and Mangalitsa pigs in particular, for business or for strictly a hobby, can be a lot of fun, and quite profitable. You will need to put in time and effort to rotate the pigs to fresh pastures, but in turn they forage for part of their food, and spread their own manure.

Pigs are the smartest animal in the world, and if treated well, can be a lot of fun to work with. If the current trend continues, and pressure from Animal rights group even further increases would not be surprised that pasture raised pigs will outnumber confinement hogs in the not to distant future.

*W*hile this is only a brief introduction, we are preparing a fully functional demonstration facility, covering over 4 acres in total, to use in more detailed instructional meetings/seminars concerning pasture raising pigs. The facility is located at Kohl Farms at 216 E Shoemith Rd, Haslett, Michigan and will be in operation from June 2017 on.

You can contact us at [royal-mangalitsa@hotmail.com](mailto:royal-mangalitsa@hotmail.com) at any time or visit our [Royal Mangalitsa Facebook](#) page for further details.



**HAVE A FUN TIME WITH YOUR PASTURED PIGS, PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN HELP, AND PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO SHARE THIS INFORMATION WITH YOUR FRIENDS**

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