

Why Our Pigs Don't Live Outdoors

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Yes, that's right. Our pigs don't live outdoors and I will tell you why it's better for their lives. Honestly, if I lived in a utopian world, I would have no problem with our pigs living outdoors. In fact, I probably would live outdoors right along side them. A Utopian world means a *perfect* life with no discomfort, sickness or injuries. But a world of utopia is just an ideologic vision that is not attainable, no matter how hard we try.

Okay, so let's journey our way back to reality. Reality is not such a bad place in a pig's life.

And here's why . . .

Weather

Weather in the upper midwest can be downright nasty. Weather patterns change *all the time*. Days in Minnesota go from blizzard conditions of -20 (or lower), with winds howling at 30-50 miles per hour, during the heart of winter to temperatures in the 90+ with high humidity during the peak of summer. And, of course, everything in between. For pigs, the weather extremes and volatile changes is hard for them to adjust. In fact, genetics also play an important part on how well they adapt to outdoor living. Providing heat in the winter and running fans in the summer in our barns is how we help them adapt to Minnesota weather. And, on those days with extreme heat of summer days, we use water sprinklers to mist the pigs to help them keep cool. An important tool in animal comfort because pigs don't sweat.

Our specific genetics are not compatible to withstand the weather extremes easily. Yes, there are some genetics that handle outdoor living better.

So why don't we change genetics so these animals can live outdoors?

It's simply because the specific pork genetics we use results in the type of pork consumers want. And it really is that simple.

Sustainable

Yes, raising pigs indoors is *sustainable*. Our efficiency level is much higher raising pigs indoors than outdoors. The pigs require *less* feed and water while living indoors. Along with efficiencies, we can easily use the manure as a soil nutrient replacement for our crops. Raising pigs outdoors on a pasture doesn't allow us to recapture of manure, whereas, pigs raised indoors do. Manure is stored in deep pits and applied yearly on crop fields. Manure is a *natural* and wonderful replacement of

important soil nutrients. *Recycling at it's best.*

Security

When pigs live indoor, we no longer have to worry about predators attacking our animals. Our biggest threat in southern Minnesota from wildlife are coyotes. Pigs could be a potential target for coyotes. And not only physical security, but also bio-security. Pigs are susceptible to viruses and certain viruses travel through the air, by birds or rodents. We now have capabilities to filter the air that goes into the barns and, as a result, reduces the amount of air-borne viruses entering the barns. We also don't have treat pigs for parasites or mange when they live indoors. By keeping pigs healthy, we all benefit by providing *safe and healthy* pork for consumers.

Clean Water and Air, Highest Quality Nutrition, Better Care

All animals living indoors have access to clean water and air. We work with an animal nutritionist to develop feed rations (same as recipe) for our pigs. In fact, our pigs eat nine different rations during their 6-month life cycle--all designed to meet their *specific nutritional needs*.

But I think the best kept "secret" is our relationship with our veterinarian. Our vet is the best. And I believe he cares at least as much as we do about our animals and their health. He has been known to email us laboratory results on weekends and nights and also demanded that we keep him updated on our pigs' health status while on vacation. He goes up and above the call of duty.

Unfortunately, these are the stories nobody hears about. And they need to be told. . .

Sows

Probably the biggest benefit of housing pigs indoors is during the reproduction cycle of sows. I hate to really admit this but sows can be mean to each other. Really *mean*. Pigs have a social hierarchy that is innate, which means that pigs have a natural pecking order process - they have to determine who is the "king pig." They determine this pecking order by fighting each other. And when I say fight, I mean really *fight*. They attack to injure or kill. On our farm, sows have died because another sow attacked it while determining this pecking order.

So how do barns help with this problem?

By the use of a gestation barn. A gestation barn houses pregnant sows in individual maternity stalls. By housing them individually, we can prevent these "pecking order" fights. And not only that, it is easier (and more effective) to care for them. We can give them the right amount and type of feed and provide individual medical care if needed.

The first question that is always asked is how do the animals react to individual stalls? Doesn't stalls cause them stress? How can that be humane?

First and foremost - there is no *perfect* sow housing. But from our experience, sows adapt very well to this type of housing. Research shows there is no increase in the stress hormone when housed individually and not only that, there are fewer abortions and the litter size is high. Common sense tells us that if the sows are stressed, reproduction is the first area to take a hit. Sows will abort litters and litter size will be small. But we see the exact opposite--high reproduction rates and high litter size. And talking to other pig farmers, many will tell you (and research backs this too) that given a choice, 80% of the sows will spend 80% of their time in stalls. And I believe it's because they feel safe and don't have to fear being attacked.

Does this mean all farmers should use individual maternity pens?

No. Every pig farmer will raise pigs the best way they know. It depends on genetics, resources, expertise and knowledge. But the best news? There is room for *all of us*. We are all raising safe and healthy food for families in the best way we know.

Complete and Utter Dedication

The bottom line is **we care** for our animals. And I mean we really *care* for our animals. No one in their right mind would do this if they didn't. There is a lot of *risk* in raising pigs that we have no control over and not only that, it's *hard work*. Period.

And I can't tell you how frustrating it is when people who have an anti-agricultural agenda tell a story about how we don't care. Their "little secret" is they know "emotions" sell and by taking advantage of people's emotions, it provides a nice mechanism to fund their "cause." Unfortunately, the story they tell is not the truth. I can assure you they have never met a pig farmer, because if they did, they will know their "story" doesn't hold any weight . . .

Want to know more about pig farming and other pig farmers?

[Makayla Nepp and Her Love For Pigs](#)

[The Part of Farming I Hate](#)

[Gotta Pork Question? Ask a Pig Farmer!](#)

[When Our Animals Get Sick and Die](#)

[What You Need to Know About Antibiotics in Pigs](#)

[Why We Use Individual Gestation Pens for Our Pigs](#)

[What I Wish People Knew About Pig Farming](#)

[Are Pig Farmers Good Environmental Stewards?](#)

[Let's Take The "Factory" Out of Factory Farms](#)

[We Raise "Locally Grown" Food in our CAFO - Is That Possible?](#)