

## **Finishing pigs: conversion is more than respecting the standards**

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### **Introduction**

Food scares, mainly BSE and antibiotics, have sharpened consumers concerns about food safety and quality and have increased public attention on agricultural production, food processing and agricultural policy. The demand for organic food has increased drastically in the year 2001. In particular, the demand for organically produced pork can not be satisfied. Accordingly, the interest of organic and conventional farmers to finish pigs organically has risen. To-date in Germany little information providing guidance to farmers beginning to finish pigs is available. The general objective of this research project is to describe the state of organic pig finishing in Germany, to analyse the most frequently encountered problems related to an up-take of organic pig finishing, to develop strategies to overcome these problems and provide the base to develop a conversion guidebook. The specific objective of this paper is to present the results of a pilot study which was designed to further explore the research problem and test the feasibility of the study design.

### **Materials and Methods**

A case study approach was taken to further explore the research problem: Thirteen organic farmers finishing pigs in Southwest Germany were interviewed in-depth, including an extensive farm visit. A standardised questionnaire covered all aspects of production and processing. Several open questions had the aim of identifying the most frequently encountered problems in the process of up-take of organic pig finishing in Southwest Germany. The methodological approach and the achieved results were discussed with various experts in view of an appropriate research design for the national investigation.

### **Results and Discussion**

In the investigated region, organic pigs are fattened mainly in herds of less than 100 pigs (70% of farms) (Klumpp 2002). These are mostly kept in former conventional housing systems adapted to organic standards. These housing systems bring about several problems: i) poor access to open air and grazing, ii) high straw requirements, iii) poor mechanisation of manure disposal and thus high labour requirements. Small herd sizes and minor sales volumes per week result in the continuous use of housing without regular disinfection, which result in health problems. Problems observed that are primarily related to organic production standards are high labour requirements for roughage production and feeding and a sub-optimal fattening efficiency due to a poor quality of protein supply (lack of essential amino acids) (Klumpp 2002).

To compensate for high production costs due to the mentioned factors farmers pursue different value adding strategies. In some cases, slaughtering, processing and direct marketing is performed on-farm. However, the high inputs of qualified labour and investments in facilities required often do not seem economically justified. Other farms slaughter and process externally due to a lack of on-farm labour taking high costs for transport and labour into account, but direct market on-farm. Apart from issues related to production, a deficit of accessible information material on conversion to or up-take of organic pig production is identified. The most important information requirements being on processing and marketing processes and their economic evaluation (Klumpp 2002).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The presented case studies conducted in Southwest Germany provided valuable insight in the production processes of organic pig fattening farms in Germany. Starting points for improving production seem to lie mainly in improved housing systems, feeding and health. Farmers consider processing and marketing the main problems. An economic evaluation of different processing and marketing in relation to conditions for production seems to be desperately needed.

From an methodological point of view, the present case study facilitated the identification of general weaknesses in the interview design and production processes in Southwest Germany. However, a larger data base of interviewed and visited farmers as well as insight to farm accounts is needed to derive universally valid, critical success factors which will provide the base for the envisaged guidebook for organic pig producers.

### **References**

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