



FREE-RANGE PIG HUSBANDRY SYSTEMS

CASE STUDY FARM_NO_02

Norwegian Centre for Organic Agriculture – NORSØK

Berit Marie Blomstrand

berit.blomstrand@norsok.no



Picture 1. Free-roaming finishing pigs. Foto: B. Blomstrand

The farm has been operated organically since 2015 by the farmer, with the support from her life partner and a permanent employee. Of the farm's 40 hectares, 11 ha are fully cultivated grassland and 39 ha forest. The farm has 20 breeding sows and produces approximately 430 finishing pigs per year. The production is situated around an insulated barn built in 1980. The sows farrow in horse boxes with wood shavings for bedding and continuous access to roughage. The separate areas for sows with piglets, growers, and finisher pigs are equipped with deep litter bedding, and the animals can roam freely in and out of the barn at their will. Animals can be isolated in the barn whenever necessary.

Natural behaviour and animal welfare in conjunction with product quality, are the highest priorities for the farmer.

History of the farm

The farm_NO_02 is located in the south-eastern part of Norway, an area characterised by a humid continental climate with cold, snowy winters and mild, green summers. The region receives steady precipitation throughout the year, supporting lush forests and vibrant vegetation, especially in the warmer months. Thanks to its fertile surroundings and ample rainfall, the landscape is especially verdant and scenic in late spring and summer.

Pig rearing

One week prior to farrowing, pregnant sows are isolated into farrowing areas, repurposed old horse boxes. One week after farrowing, the sows and their piglets are allowed to mingle with other like-minded animals, and gain access to an outdoor paddock. Freedom of movement, late weaning, and animal welfare both with regard to physical and mental health of the animals are important to the farmer: happy, healthy pigs make the farmer happy and healthy.

After weaning, the piglets are moved to an area with other grower pigs, where each grower pig has access to more than 200 m² of area. The barn is divided into areas where growers and fattening pigs have separate areas with deep litter bedding and free access to both pastures and forest. Breeding sows are kept in insulated huts with access to pasture and forest areas. Here they are inseminated and remain until one week before farrowing, when they are moved to the farrowing stable. The insulation in the huts helps minimize condensation inside the huts during winter and keeps the temperature inside the huts down during summer. The temperature in the barn and the huts is at comfortable levels for the animals even during cold winters.

The animals are fenced with one electric fence consisting of 2-3 wires. In case of wild boars roaming the area, the animals are locked into the barn with restricted outdoor access. The outdoor areas are rotated twice a year.



Picture 2. Sows in the farrowing area before birth. Photo: B. Blomstrand

Environmental aspects

Both sows and finisher pigs have access to watercourses which act as a source of drinking water and cooling medium during summer. The area can become quite muddy during periods of heavy precipitation. However, the farmer observes minimal runoff into nearby streams or rivers.

Market

The farmer agrees that the most challenging aspect of being an organic pig farmer is marketing and selling the products. She sells her products through Strøm-Larsen, a local meat processing company which distributes its products directly to restaurants and end consumers in the Oslo area.

Health and welfare

According to the farmer, health issues are generally few. She experienced that Duroc mix breeding sows had poor maternal traits, leading to increased piglet mortality. Therefore, she avoids using duroc when inseminating.

Antiparasitic treatment and vaccinations

The farmer receives feedback from the abattoir indicating that parasite-related pathological changes, specifically “milk spots”, has been seen in the liver of her animals. Although parasitic examination of faecal samples did not confirm the presence of parasites, she started treating sows and piglets against intestinal parasites. Furthermore, all animals follow the standard vaccination protocols against swine erysipelas, coli, and parvovirus.



Picture 3. Free roaming finisher pigs, spring. Photo: B. Blomstrand

Table 1. Farm statistics

| Farm category | Information |
|---|---|
| Breed | TN70 |
| Number of sows | 20 |
| No. slaughtered animals per year (2023) | 430 |
| Full-time equivalent | 1.5-1.7 |
| Other species | No |
| Feed | Free access to concentrate, roughage, forest, and pasture |
| Average annual farrowings per sow | 2 |
| Mutilations | Very few to none |
| General health | Good |
| Weaning age | >6 weeks |
| Slaughter weight | 87 kg (5.5 months old) |
| Area per grower pig | >200 m ² |

This fact sheet is developed as a deliverable in the Roam-FREE project, <https://projects.au.dk/coreorganiccofund/2021-call-projects/default-title>. The author acknowledges the financial support for this project provided by funding bodies, partners of the H2020 ERA-NET CORE Organic Co-fund, under the 2021 Call.

