PRACTICE ABSTRACT

Foraging of organic finishing pigs on protein-rich fodder

Problem

The free-range area for finishing pigs is generally not optimized for its nutritional value through grazing. Furthermore, low roughage intake is not optimal for health, welfare of pigs and the nutritional quality of the meat. Finally, a significant quantity of feed is consumed at this stage which can be costly.

Solution

Introduce a diversity of protein-rich fodder, so that the finishing pigs forage as soon as weather conditions permit, over the longest possible period of the year.

Benefits

Well organized foraging, with good quality fodder, reduces the amount of concentrates consumed and increases the food autonomy of the farm.

Access to fresh fodder is valuable for pig health and welfare and for the nutritional quality of the meat (fatty acid profiles).

Applicability box

Theme
Pigs, feeding and ration planning

Geographical coverage
Relevant for any region allowing the outdoor breeding of pigs, and the cultivation of fodder

Application Time
When the crop is established and has reached a nutritionally interesting growth stage

Required time
Sowing forage crops, fencing management

Period of impact
From 70 kg to slaughter

Equipment
Mobile fences, outdoor feeder and water trough on the fodder plot.

Best in
Outdoor farms with finishing pigs (from 18 weeks of age).

Practical recommendation

- Carry out a provisional grazing schedule, based on a diversity of crops (figures 1 and 2), with the aim of having fodder at the optimum stage throughout the year.
- Adapt the amount of concentrates fed according to the amount and quality of fodder available on the plots. Feed rationing leads to lower fat carcasses but can also decrease the carcass weight if too little concentrate is fed.
- On farm trials show that If concentrate feed is reduced by 30%, the fattening should be extended by 30 days maximum. Similarly, a 15% reduction in rations will require a maximum of 12-day extension.
- Graze the fodder at its optimum stage to avoid waste. Woody forage will not be very palatable. When there is an excess of forage, it can be harvested and preserved for feeding during the housing period.
- Position a water trough and feed troughs on the pastured plot to facilitate moving the pigs (figure 4).
- Create corridors around the paddocks, by crushing a strip of vegetation (figure 3): this encourages the movement of animals and facilitates the installation of mobile fences and their visualization by the pigs (particularly in tall crops).
- Aim for a balance between annual and perennial crops to limit the cost of sowing fodder.
- Take care to preserve the state of the soil and crops, especially for perennial crops: give priority to paddock grazing management.
- The choice of fodder species and varieties should be considered for their cost, their agronomic performance and their nutritional value. Legumes are preferred by pigs.

Figure 1: Finishing pigs foraging moha/Crimson clover/Egyptian clover during the summer. Photo: Stanislas Lubac, ITAB.

Figure 2: Finishing pigs foraging maize/bean during the autumn. Photo: Carl Sheard.

Figure 3: Arrangement of crushed corridors to facilitate the movement of animals. Mobile fences made of electrified strips. Photo: Stanislas Lubac, ITAB.

Figure 4: Troughs on the pastured plot to facilitate moving the animals. Photo: Carl Sheard.

Further information

Video

- Check the following video: Foraging pigs in a crop of maize, bean and courgettes
- Check the following video: Contribution of protein-rich fodder to finishing pigs
- Have a look at the following video for further instructions about sow foraging "Pâturage des truies sur parcours à haute valeur protéique" (French)

References & further reading

- Crawley K., 2015. Fulfilling 100% organic pig diets: feeding roughage and foraging from the range. ICOPP, Technical note 4. 4 p. Available here.
- Maupertuis F., 2018. *Economiser des protéines dans l'aliment des truies gestantes élevées en plein air grâce au pâturage de légumineuses*. L'agriculture biologique en Pays de la Loire, résultats de recherche. Chambre d'agriculture Pays de la Loire n°153. 4 p. Available here.
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Weblinks

- Check the Organic Farm Knowledge platform for more practical information.

About this practice abstract and OK-Net EcoFeed

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