

# Intensive pork production

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## Introduction

The protection of livestock in some form of housing has been practiced for centuries in a range of climates because it enabled farmers to better care for their livestock.

Stock such as sheep, goats and poultry have been housed for protection from predators; while larger animals such as horses, pigs and dairy cows have been housed to improve their performance as a result of better management.

“Intensive pork production” refers to both indoor and outdoor pork production systems although it is typically associated with indoor production systems.

In this context ‘Intensive’ implies the organisation of the system in such a way as to maximise the efficiency of production.

‘Efficiency of production’ refers to a management system where the emphasis is on productive healthy animals with efficient use of inputs.

Intensive indoor piggeries are often referred to as ‘factory farming’. Farmers and other industry participants find this term misleading and offensive.

This document aims to present some objective information about intensive pork production – why it developed and how it is currently changing.

**Figure 1:** There are many facets to intensive indoor pork production. Pictured here are weaners on straw bedding in an eco-shelter.



Source: Jayce Morgan

**Figure 2:** A litter of very contented piglets. The farrowing crate allows piglets their own rest area and reduces the risk of overlay.



Source: Jayce Morgan

## History

The last 40 to 50 years has seen the increasing use of housing in the pork industry for a range of reasons:

- Improved care and management of the animals. For example there are fewer problems with internal and external parasites with pigs housed indoors. Baby piglets are not predated by foxes or birds.
- More efficient use of labour and feed supply resulting in better pig survival and production
- Changing economic situation – shrinking margins, increasing costs and other marketing pressures
- Vagaries of climate which affect animal welfare and productivity. Pigs do not sweat so benefit from controlled environments in hot weather
- Changes to feed supply – a move to better quality grain feeding
- Farmers are better able to provide the safe, good quality pork that today's consumers demand.

In Australia the majority of intensive pig farms are family owned and operated however many of them started out as small operations with small numbers of pigs that were produced outdoors.

Not all farmers have embraced the indoor systems, and there has been varying degrees of community acceptance to this style of farming for some time.

## Animal welfare – perception versus reality

Our beliefs and experience with animals shape our views on what is appropriate animal welfare.

Many people including scientists and farmers believe they are providing good welfare when the pigs are housed indoors because the pigs are:

- well fed and watered
- protected from the weather extremes, parasites and predators
- kept in good health.

To achieve good production you require good animal welfare.

Other people including some scientists and farmers believe a pig only has good welfare if it is free to roam outside on pasture and in sunshine.

***In reality any pig raising system is only as good as its manager and the stock people working in the system. Pigs can get sick in all systems; pigs can be stressed in all systems. Pig welfare is dependent on the people and management of the system.***

Figure 3: Weaners ready for a feed. This photograph is from an intensive indoor piggyery.



Source: Jayce Morgan

Figure 4: Weaners from another indoor farm. Water nozzles are situated over a grated drain to keep the pen and bedding dry.



Source: Jayce Morgan

## What about media images of the pork industry?

There is no denying that some images of pork production systems in the media are confronting and some do not reflect well on industry.

However Australian pig farms are required to adhere to high welfare standards that are based on animal care. These standards were developed through a process of consultation between government and industry representatives, veterinarians and animal welfare groups. These standards are legislated in Australia.

Indoor intensive farms continue to upgrade to meet changes in animal welfare regulations, marketplace requirements and community expectations.

Market signals in Australia and elsewhere around the world are indicating that animal welfare is a concern to consumers.

Australian pork producers have moved to voluntarily cease the use of gestation stalls by 2017. Some sow stalls will remain for use as mating stalls. After the 5 day mating period the sows are relocated to group housing.

It is estimated that 65% of sows in Australia will be in stall free systems by the end of 2014.

The industry and research partners through the Pork CRC have invested considerable time and money to assist farmers to develop group housed systems for sows during gestation as a result of market pressures.

Current research is also investigating alternative farrowing systems for sows.

Most Australian pork producers work hard to care for their animals and take pride in their farm operations.

**Figure 5: Finisher pigs on another intensive indoor farm. Pigs are protected from weather extremes, are well fed and watered and are healthy and happy.**



Source: Jayce Morgan

**Figure 6: Some sow stalls will remain on some farms for use when breeding sows (5 day period) or for individualised attention for veterinary purposes. Other farmers will remove all their stalls.**



Source: Jayce Morgan

## Efficiency is not a dirty word

Intensive indoor farms are often called factory farms because the emphasis is on productivity of the system with efficient use of resources.

This means well bred pigs, fed high quality diets that lead to good growth rates, in a hygienic and safe environment managed by well trained and competent people.

People who rely on farming as their major source of income are all trying to maximise productivity to maintain profitability.

If a farm is not profitable there is no money for investment in improved facilities and equipment. This is true for pig farmers in all management systems – indoor and outdoor. It is not peculiar to indoor pig farms.

Markets today have strict product specifications for the type of product they require. Farmers work to meet those specifications so their produce is saleable in the market place.

Product specifications include:

- Quality product confirmed by a quality assurance program. Consumers and food processors demand safe food free from contaminants and disease. Currently around 88% of sows and their progeny are on farms on which are registered with the Australian Pork Industry Quality Assurance Scheme APIQV®.
- Regular supply – the majority of retail outlets demand regular supply. This means farmers must plan the production pattern of their enterprise to meet their market requirements for a full year cycle.
- Strict specifications in reference to carcass weight and fatness with heavy penalties for carcasses outside the sweet spot on the price grid. The price grid needs to be met by each delivery of pigs over a long period of time through all seasonal conditions.
- Market niche requirements such as black pigs, free range or organic pigs. Some markets have very specific requirements and require special input from the farmers servicing them.

Not all farmers adopt all the same techniques to produce their product, but to remain in business the farm must be profitable and sustainable.

Australian farmers compete against imported pork. The imported pork dominates the processed pork sector such as ham, bacon and other small goods.

Australian farmers supply the fresh pork market and only a relatively small portion of the processed pork market (estimated at around 30%).

Imported pork products come from intensive indoor production systems produced in countries with varied welfare standards.

**Figure 7: Dry sows on straw on an intensive indoor piggery.**



Source: Jayce Morgan

**Figure 8: Group housed sows – another farm.**



Source: Trish Holyoake

## Who will feed the world?

As the human population grows and the effects of climate change creates uncertainty about future food production the focus of discussion often turns to food security and how the world's people will be fed.

Debated ideas range from increased use of technological systems such as intensive livestock production through to a greater use of eco-farming systems.

Some groups even advocate a diet change to vegan or vegetarian diets.

The reality is more likely that we will need all production methods and consumers will choose the diet that best suits their health needs and affordability.

Consumer expectations for food are said to revolve around 3 main criteria:

- Affordable food
- Safe food
- Welfare friendly food

However some industry experts cite studies with consumers that demonstrate that when consumers are asked open 'unaided questions' their expectations revolve around:

- Taste
- Cost
- Nutrition

In the future all systems of food production will have their place.

These systems will need to:

- engage people
- ensure profit and sustainability
- care for the environment
- care for the welfare of animals
- operate within the community culture.

## Suggested further reading

The following book and document references are provided for students and anyone interested in furthering their knowledge in the debate about animal welfare and our food supply.

The titles have been chosen to give a diverse view of intensive pork production, its role into the future for our food supply and the ease of understanding of each of the articles.

## References:

- *The Coming Famine – the global food crisis and what we can do to avoid it* by Julian Cribb CSIRO Publishing 2010
  - This book provides a sobering picture of the current and emerging problems with world food supply. There is also comment on the discussion about what type of farming will be best for future food supply P65.
- [FAO Readings in Ethics 2: “Animal welfare and the intensification of animal production – An alternative interpretation”](#) (PDF 1.64MB) by David Fraser Animal Welfare Program, Faculty of Land and Food Systems and W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics University of British Columbia, Canada, Produced by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations Rome 2005.
  - As the title suggests this paper give an alternative view into the how and why intensive animal production developed. It is suggested that the problem is not the ‘erosion of animal care values by producers as much as the values of consumers expressed through their purchasing habits...’ (p14).
- [Farmers Fare well with better animal welfare](#) Farm Policy Journal Volume 11 No 1 Autumn Quarter 2014. This edition of the farm policy journal focuses on the animal welfare debate. Articles included cover the following topics:
  - Do Natural Settings Safeguard the Welfare of Domesticated Animals? By Paul Hemsworth, Graeme Coleman and Jeremy Skuse; Animal Welfare Science Centre University of Melbourne.
  - Making slaughter houses more humane for cattle pigs and sheep by Temple Grandin Department of Animal Sciences Colorado State University.

- The costs and benefits of animal welfare: How the United Kingdom pork industry adapted to changes in animal welfare by Mick Sloyan
- The future of animal welfare policy and its implications for Australian livestock industries by Jed Goodfellow, Melina Tensen and Lynne Bradshaw
- Interview with Gardner Murray Special adviser to the OIE and former Australian Chief Veterinary Officer. The OIE is the World Organisation for Animal Health and since 2002 animal welfare is one of the topics it has to address. Australia can be proud of its animal welfare record both internationally and domestically.
- Interview with Dougal Gordon CEO Australian Lot Feeders Association. This interview examines Australian feedlots and their animal welfare guarantee.
- [Technology's Role in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Making safe, affordable and abundant food a global reality \(PDF 1.03MB\)](#) by Jeff Simmons Elanco. This paper presents information supporting the increasing and continued use of technology in food production. It is argued that this supports 3 basic human rights:
  - The right to food
  - The right of choice
  - Sustainability and environmental protection

This paper also outlines the results of International Consumer Attitudes Study (ICAS). Consumers were asked unaided questions where consumers provided their own answers and these were compared with consumer spending patterns.

Results showed that “98 % of consumers consider taste (43.48%), cost (31.51%) and nutrition (23.02%) as the top 3 factors when making food purchase decisions.”
- [Report: Agroecology and the right to food](#) by Olivier de Schutter UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
  - “..the Special Rapporteur identifies agroecology as a mode of agricultural development which not only shows strong conceptual connections with the right to food, but has proven results for fast progress in the concretisation of this human right for many vulnerable groups in various countries and environments. Moreover, agroecology delivers advantages that are complementary to better known conventional approaches such as breeding high yielding varieties. And it strongly contributes to the broader economic development.”
- Article: “Will eating less meat (and ice cream) cool the world?” By Mick Keogh Executive Director Australian Farm Institute in [Farm Institute Insights Newsletter Volume 7 No 1 January 2010 \(PDF 2.8MB\)](#)
  - This article provides a general overview of the debate around animal agriculture’s contribution to Global Warming - an easy to read introduction to this aspect of the greater food debate.
- Scientific paper: “Happy pigs are dirty!” – Conflicting perspectives on animal welfare by J Lassen, P Sandøe and B Forkman in *Livestock Science* 103 (2006) pp 221-230.
  - This paper describes a case study conducted in Denmark and attempts to highlight the different perspectives and ethical viewpoints between lay persons and scientists in the realm of animal welfare. “*Different stakeholders will take different views of the ethical issues that underpin welfare measurement, and this has a number of important implications.*” For a scientific paper it is interesting and easy to read.
- [Australian Pork Limited Website](#)
  - Australian Pork Limited (APL) is the peak body for the pork industry. There are links on this page to further information about the Australian pork industry.
- [Pork CRC Website](#) – current research programs for the Australian pork industry
 

Program 1: Reduced confinement of sows and piglets

Sub-program 1A-105: Developing commercially-viable, confinement-free farrowing and lactation systems – Rebecca Morrison, Rivalea

  - Part 1 Report – [PigSafe System \(PDF 1.43 MB\)](#)
  - Part 2 Report – [Norwegian UMB Farrowing Pen System PDF \(2.45 MB\)](#)

- From Farm gate to your plate – SuperButcher video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xp5RNsmI7-A>
- Gooralie Free Range pork – SuperButcher video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTrVgKPP-tQ>

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