

Pig keeping outdoors

Pigs are a great way of assisting land management in a natural and sustainable way, as part of a broader program or clearing a small area covered in weeds and unwanted undergrowth.^[1]

As omnivores, pigs have a tremendous rooting capacity. Their natural ability to cultivate the soil allows them to clear ground quickly as well as providing natural fertiliser in the form of manure, leaving the land ready to reseed. Pigs can clear a vast majority of ground vegetation including bracken^[2], couch grass and brambles. They reduce the need for weed control and create seed beds for natural regeneration.

Key considerations when using pigs include the effects of soil erosion and poaching to the land. Exposed and steeply sloping sites or those with heavy land (e.g. clay) or high rainfall levels can aggravate soil erosion issues. Chalky and sandy soil in exposed areas can also suffer as the foliage roots are quickly cleared leaving the top soil exposed to erosion. Management is critical to keep within the rules of cross compliance under the Basic Payment Scheme.

Ideally, low stocking densities should be maintained and paddocks should be rested regularly. Stocking rate is dependent on the characteristics of the land but it is recommended that a maximum of 28 growers or two breeding sows and their offspring should be kept per hectare.

Christine Coe, Chair of the Pedigree Pork Committee, British Pig Association said “As long as they’re provided with plenty of fodder, clean water and good shelter, pigs offer a sustainable way to help manage even the roughest land”.

In addition to the critical aspects about where to keep your pigs for the intended purpose, there is an equally important plan required at the outset to ensure their health and welfare.

Wallows must be prepared and maintained from May onwards. Pigs must not overheat in summer as even normal Welsh summer temperatures can have serious effects on long term health and fertility. Shelter, if in the form of huts/arks must be sited with entrances towards prevailing wind in summer and turned 180 degrees for winter.

Perimeter boundaries are necessary for stock security and biosecurity. A purposeful loading and unloading point is useful, and strict measures for limiting access should be implemented. Make certain that pigs have full access to drinking water in both the summer and winter months.

Bob Stevenson MRCVS, vet and member of the National Pig Health and Welfare Council said “Having sourced your pigs from a known healthy herd of the breed and type that is best for you, certain more positive health measures are necessary”.

It is recommended that a health plan with veterinary input is prepared. Key health considerations are as follows.

BREEDING (Gilts/Sows and Boars)	GROWING (Weaned to finished pigs)
Follow the Erysipelas vaccination programme	Avoid growth slowdown and condemned livers by controlling Ascarid worms
Control worms that affect sow and litter health (in-feed or injection)	Consider other vaccines as necessary and as recommended by your vet
Control ectoparasites (mange and lice)	Finished pigs may be tested for <i>Trichinella</i> at the abattoir

More details on identifying and preventing diseases on our [Stop Disease in Pigs factsheet](#).

[1] Provided that the area does not fall under EIA Regulation where a screening application would need to be submitted before any land improvement is carried out.

[2] Pigs can be poisoned by bracken occasionally especially if the main material for sustenance and no supplementary feed is provided.