

# THE BACKYARD PIG

## DPIPWE's guide for hobby farmers

### Before you get your pig

- Check whether your local council has any restrictions on having a pig on your property. Some councils do, some councils don't.
- You must have a Property Identification Code (PIC) to buy a pig. Application forms for PICs are available from the [DPIPWE website](#).
- Ensure you have an adequate shelter for your pig (see below).
- Ensure you have a fencing arrangement that enables you to rotate your pig(s) from paddock to paddock. And that the fencing is good enough to restrain a pig (see below).

### Buying a pig

- Anyone who sells you a pig must provide you with a vendor declaration. The minimum information required is listed on the [DPIPWE website](#).
- Pigs that have been bred for an intensive farming operation may not be the best option for your hobby farm. They have generally been selectively bred to avoid becoming fat when confined permanently indoors. Such pigs can struggle to maintain condition if they live outdoors. The best option is to get your pig from someone who has free range pigs.
- The pig you buy should be neither too fat nor too lean and, for obvious reasons, should look healthy (i.e. make sure you are not buying someone else's problem). If buying a pig direct from another property, you should ensure you get details of the pig's health status – what vaccinations they have had and whether they are current, recent treatments for worms and external parasites, any other medications used and so on. Ideally, visit their property and look

at their other pigs as that may help you identify any problems. If you buy at auction, you are unlikely to be able to get information about the health status of the pig (although the vendor declaration does supply basic information for tracing purposes).

- As a general rule, pig breeds that are totally white are less suitable for free range because they are more susceptible to sunburn and less hardy than pure breeds or crossbreds with pigmented skins.
- Any pig over 10 weeks old must have a tattoo before moving to a new property, so check any pig you buy complies. (Please note that there are current discussions about introducing tagging requirements for pigs, so the tattoo requirement may change).
- You should give a pig a quarantine drench when it first arrives on your property.

### Managing your pig(s)

- Your pig must have access to good shelter. The shelter doesn't have to be the Hilton, but it must be weatherproof and dry inside, ideally with a concrete floor. Your shelter should provide at least 2 square metres per pig and at least double that for a sow with piglets. If you don't provide good shelter, you are in breach of the animal welfare requirements and risk being fined.
- Straw and old hay make good bedding. It is important to provide such bedding in the shelter, although you should ensure it is not mouldy. When changing the bedding, move the old material so it is well out of the pig's reach. Old bedding can be composted or put onto a part of your vegie patch that is being spelled.

### **Managing your pig (continued)**

- At least some of the paddock must be well-drained and dry. The idea that pigs like to live in muck is nonsense. They do like to wallow in mud on a hot day as a means of cooling off, but pigs do not thrive in cold, wet conditions.
- You will need to rotate your pig(s) onto fresh pasture from time to time, preferably before more than 60% of the ground cover has been removed. Otherwise they will turn the paddock into a mudbath and that is not acceptable in terms of their health and welfare. You can help reduce the build-up of disease risks by regular pasture rotation and spelling.
- Your pig must have access to cool, clean water at all times. A growing pig will drink 10 or more litres a day, depending on the weather. A sow with litter will need at least 30 litres a day, and 45 in warmer weather. If you are relying on an automated watering system, you must check it daily and it must be out of direct sunlight during the summer months. Note that water coming through an exposed poly pipe will be too hot in summer for your pig to drink. If you are relying on a non-automated system (for example an old bath or trough), you should check the water daily and drain and replenish as often as necessary to prevent the water becoming fouled. Just using a bucket is not on as it is easily tipped over.
- When moving pigs, move them gently. Never use a dog or an electric prod. Some people find using a board, held in front to act as a portable fence, can be useful in moving a stubborn pig.

### **Feeding your pig(s)**

- Unless you have a very good understanding of pig nutrition, pig feed from your rural merchandiser will be a better diet than a home mix. A pig's diet needs to be balanced, so a formulated feed is best. Pasture is not a sufficient diet for any pig and any pig with an increased nutritional need (ie a weaner, lactating or pregnant sow) will get into trouble quickly if not provided with a sufficient diet.
- Pigs must be fed daily. The amount of feed necessary will depend on
  - whether the pig is a grower, is lactating, is pregnant or none of these (ie it is dry)

- whether the pig has access to pasture, forage or other sources of alternative feed (but see below re using waste human food)

- the weather conditions. Outside pigs need more feed than pigs confined indoors in a controlled temperature environment, and will need even more in cold weather.

- Pregnant sows and boars need some bulky or high fibre feed in addition to the normal ration
- You should learn how to body score your pig, as this is the best way a hobby farmer can assess whether the amount and make-up of feed being given is right. A guide to body condition scoring is attached (below). A condition score of 3 to 3.5 is the ideal (but it is okay for breeding sows to fall to 2.5 at weaning). If your pigs are outside this range, you will need to alter your feeding regime. Note that pigs in free range will usually be a bit leaner than pigs in intensive conditions – and this is healthy.
- Never ever feed swill. It may seem like commonsense to feed kitchen scraps or restaurant waste to your pig, but it is illegal to feed any food waste that contains, or has been in contact with even the smallest quantity of meat or meat product. Swill feeding can cause an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) – and it did just that in the UK in 2001 and that resulted in the death of around 5 million animals – and a range of other serious pig diseases. Note that bakery waste that contains small amounts of meat (waste from ham and cheese topped rolls, pies etc.) is swill and must not be fed to pigs. We can, and do, prosecute swill feeders in Tasmania.
- Fruit and vegetable waste is okay to feed to your pig, providing it isn't contaminated with even a small amount of meat or meat product. But note that it is nowhere near being a complete diet for your pig.
- Never feed processed pig feed to ruminant animals, such as sheep, cattle, goats or alpacas. It may contain "restricted animal material" or RAM (typically some kind of animal product) and there is a ban on feeding RAM to ruminants to help prevent mad cow disease.
- Never run a ruminant animal with your pig or in any other way enable it to access pig feed. Also, ensure that ruminants can't access any bags of processed pig feed – not only because

### **Feeding your pig (continued)**

of the risk of them consuming RAM but also ruminants gorging on grain-based feed can get grain poisoning, which can be fatal.

- Store your pig feed in vermin proof containers – not just to prevent feed wastage/spoilage but also to protect your pig's health. 200litre drums with lids are cheap and effective.

## **Pig health**

- A pig on a smallholding that has a balanced and adequate diet is likely to have few health problems. A pig that is under-nourished or that is obese will almost certainly have some health problems. So, getting the diet right is the best thing you can do for your pig's health.
- You should ensure your pig has current vaccination against Leptospirosis and Erysipelas. They need two starter shots – one at around 6 weeks and another at 12 weeks – and then an annual booster. If you do not know whether the pig has current vaccination against these two diseases, you should vaccinate it on arrival on your property, with a booster 6 weeks later and annually after that.
- Worms are generally more of a problem in free range pigs than intensively farmed pigs. The more common signs of a worm problem are diarrhoea or simply a failure to thrive. You should seek the advice of your vet about a routine worming program.
- Colibacillosis (*E. coli*) is both a common and an expensive disease of pigs. The most common sign is diarrhoea. It can be treated if diagnosed early. The risk can be reduced by maintaining good hygiene and by making any feed changes gradually.
- The two most common external parasites are mange and lice. Both can be treated by ivermectin products available from your vet or rural supplier. Good hygiene will help prevent a problem in the first place.

## **Emergency pig disease**

As a pig owner, you have a responsibility to report any signs of an emergency animal disease. There are several such diseases for pigs and you should familiarise yourself with their signs.

- Foot and mouth disease (FMD) - the first sign is likely to be lameness and, on closer inspection, blisters or sores on or just above the feet or around the mouth.
- Aujeszky's disease – signs include abortion, weak or stillborn piglets, coughing and fever.
- Classical swine fever – first signs are usually off feed and fever, followed by dog sitting position/loss of use of legs, sudden depression, discoloured skin.
- Swine vesicular disease – signs are similar to foot and mouth disease (see above)
- There are several other emergency diseases that you are required to report if you see the signs. Essentially, you should always contact your vet if your pig is sick or dies and you do not know the cause.

Anyone failing to report an emergency animal disease is not only risking a fine, they may also be endangering the health and welfare of other animals in the district. Some of the emergency pig diseases are highly and quickly contagious and, in some cases (FMD in particular), can infect several other species.

## **Fencing for your pig**

- Providing your property, or the "pig area" within that property, has a quality permanent fence to stop pigs escaping and feral animals or stray dogs entering, electric fencing is often sufficient, as internal fencing, to confine your pig where you want it. An electric fence means you can easily shift it so your pig can access fresh pasture.
- Pigs often give a permanent fence a hard time when they first see it, so a ramshackle fence will not do. But generally pigs will respect a permanent fence once they get used to it. A permanent fence needs to be at least 90 cm high, as lean pigs can jump. But the most likely escape is by pushing under the fence or through a weak spot.
- While ringlock/hinge joint fences for sheep or cattle are usually sufficient for pigs as well, small pigs will get through the squares. So, if you have small pigs, you will need to run some netting along the fence. Hinge joint fencing especially for pigs is available through fencing suppliers.
- Plain or barb wire fencing is useless for pigs.

### *Fencing your pig (continued)*

- You need a suitable area to restrain a pig for examination and giving medications – even a sick pig can be very slippery and strong.

## **Breeding in a backyard situation**

- Pigs should be at least 125 kgs and at least 8 months old before mating. Use boars that are of similar weight and size to the sow, especially if young.
- Pregnancy lasts around 3 months, 3 weeks and 3 days (or 114 days).
- It is important to know when the sow is due to farrow. About a week before she is due to farrow, you should put fresh bedding in the shelter and use more bedding than usual so the piglets can keep warm. It is important to do this a week before she is due so she can carry out her natural nesting behaviours. Also check that there are no draughts. If farrowing in hot weather, there must be ventilation high on the walls of the shelter. Also, to reduce the risk of piglets being crushed by the sow, you should install guard rails in the shelter – we suggest 25 cms above the floor and 30 cms out from the wall.
- Check that all piglets are feeding, and thereby getting colostrum, in their first 24 hours.
- If it is necessary to wean piglets early, special attention must be given to their diet. Creep feeds are available from rural suppliers, but you should get veterinary advice on feeding and management.

## **Other pig welfare issues**

- Castration. In most cases, a male pig is slaughtered before it is old enough to be sexually active or aggressive, in which case castration is unnecessary. Castration may be carried out by an experienced person for pigs under the age of 21 days (preferably 2-7 days). A pig older than 21 days may only be castrated under anaesthetic by a vet.
- Tail docking. This should never be necessary. If tail biting is a problem, it can usually be remedied by making some minor changes to the pig's environment and/or diet.
- Clipping teeth. This should only be considered if pigs are seriously injuring the sow or each

other, in which case it should be done by a veterinarian.

- Nose ringing. If your pig is destroying its paddock by "rooting" the ground with its nose, the best option is to move the pig to a fresh paddock or provide some bulky foods (such as root crops, surplus vegetables etc) in a small "sacrifice" area in the paddock – that is, encourage the pig to root in that small area. Only if that fails should you consider nose ringing the pig and then it may only be done by a veterinary practitioner.
- Emergency euthanasia. If this is necessary, shooting by a skilled shooter is the most humane option.

## **Contacts**

For most enquiries relating to pig health and nutrition, contact your local vet.

To report what you suspect may be an emergency pig disease (including any unexplained significant sickness or unexplained mortalities), contact your local vet or the DPIPWE emergency animal disease hotline on 1800 675 888.

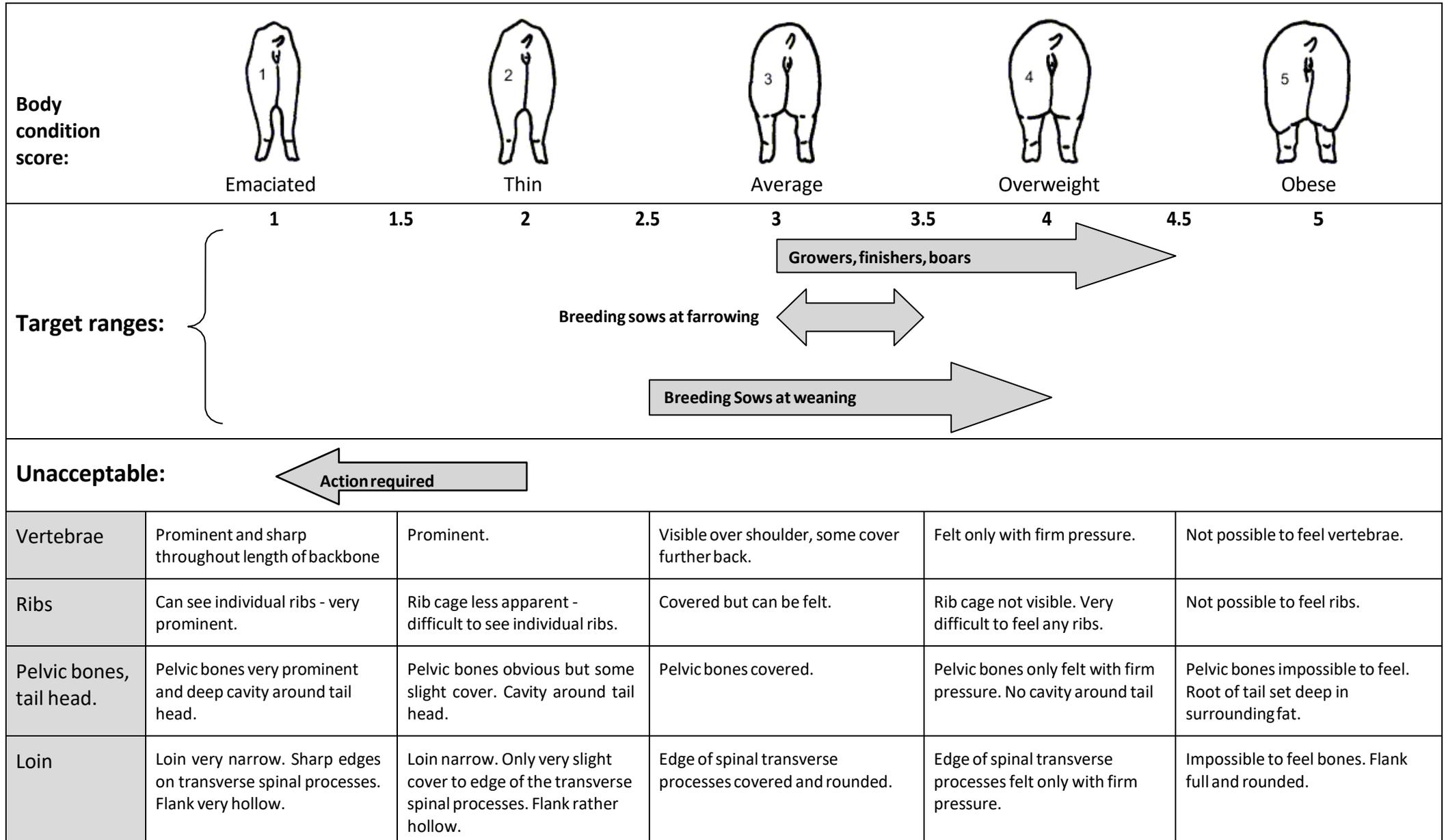
To report any animal cruelty (including neglect), phone the RSPCA Inspectorate on 1300 139 947 or by email [reportit@rspccatas.org.au](mailto:reportit@rspccatas.org.au)

To report swill feeding, or any food business that is supplying swill to a pig owner, phone our Animal Health and Welfare branch on 1300 368 550.

For more information about Property Identification Codes (PICs), vendor declarations (NVDs) or anything to do with livestock identification requirements, phone DPIPWE's Registrar of Brands on 1300 368 550.

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# Body Condition Scoring Pigs<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Pigs* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, PISC Report No. 92. Available from [www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/animalwelfarecodes](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/animalwelfarecodes)