



Best Practice Managing livestock areas

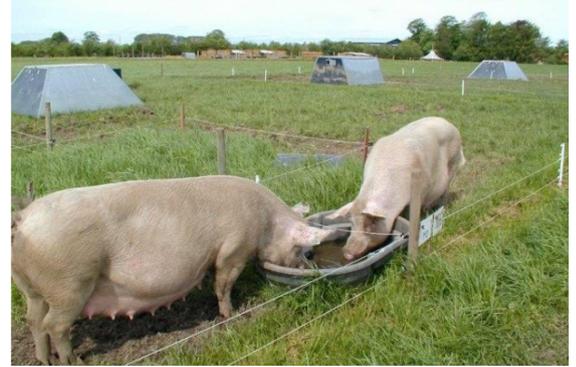
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Outdoor pigs

Why change?

Good management of outdoor pigs can help to improve their welfare, increase the efficiency of production and protect the environment. Look for opportunities to improve the management of your pig units and benefit from:

- reduced vet bills and better stock health
- reduced risk of soil and nutrient losses, and watercourse pollution
- better soil structure
- reduced carbon footprint
- improved wildlife habitats.



Well managed pig paddocks are good for welfare

Steps to Success

1. Review the current situation by examining the management of outdoor pigs on your farm. Consider factors such as soil type, condition and erosion risk, site suitability, stocking densities, stock health and environmental impacts.

2. Identify potential opportunities for changes in management of outdoor pigs to protect the soils on your farm. Look out for brown water run-off, watercourse pollution and heavily rutted or compacted tracks, which are signs that soil damage is occurring.

3. Calculate the cost-benefit of these opportunities by considering the benefits of management improvements against the cost of problems such as stock lameness, injury and waterborne disease, soil erosion, watercourse pollution and reduced wildlife habitat quality.

4. Prioritise the safest fields for outdoor pigs away from watercourses or slopes leading on to roads. Remember if soil loss on to a road causes an accident you will be liable for insurance claims and potential prosecution.

5. Develop an action plan for improved management of outdoor pigs:

- know the type and condition of soils on your farm and use this information to map erosion risk and help with site selection
- select a suitable site. Avoid extensive outdoor pig units in areas with a high erosion risk, e.g., steep, long slopes (>10%) with high rainfall, (i.e., >800mm), poor drainage, and sandy or stony soils. Ensure the border of units is at least 10m away from watercourses, and 50m away from wells or boreholes used to supply water for human consumption or for use in farm dairies
- aim to maintain grass cover and avoid exposure of bare soil to reduce soil erosion and nutrient losses. Site units on well-established grass swards rather than on arable stubble and move stock onto site in spring when the grass is actively growing. Balance stocking density with ground cover to avoid poaching. Use straw to cover wet or bare soil to provide dry feeding areas and reduce erosion
- maintain tracks between paddocks to avoid erosion, rutting and channelling of muddy water towards watercourses
- consider the layout of your pig units carefully. Locate grassed corridors across slopes to restrict surface run-off. Use fenced buffer strips where fields are adjacent to watercourses
- use hedgerows as natural windbreaks, to provide shelter and shade, and to reduce erosion and run-off
- rotate paddocks regularly to prevent the build up of parasites and to restore soil structure. Follow as soon as possible with a grass ley, or early sown winter or spring cereals, to ensure soil protection.

6. Check your soils regularly, particularly during rainfall, for erosion. Manage problems early and minimise costs.

Outdoor pigs - practical examples

600 sow intensive outdoor unit

A farmer with 350 acres of gently sloping, generally low erosion risk land, has a rotation of spring cereals followed by pigs onto the bare stubble. The sows are without nose rings (farm assurance scheme welfare requirement). Each field has 20 sows with an average of 10 piglets that are moved into a straw yard after 2 months and weaned onto grassland in March/April.

The sows "rooting" damage, followed by recent heavier, winter rainfall have caused considerable damage to the soil structure and serious loss of topsoil. The run-off is apparent across fields, through gateways onto roads and into watercourses.

The farmer faces costs resulting from Cross Compliance and Farming Rules for Water inspections loss of valuable topsoil and nutrients, additional field operations, costs of cleaning ditches, charges from the local authority for road cleaning and potential pollution fines, legal costs and civil damages claims.



Ensure free draining and stable soils for pig paddocks



There can be large amounts of soil lost from poorly managed pig paddocks

Practical solutions

- Avoid putting outdoor pigs on steep sloping fields.
- Avoid rainfall areas exceeding 800 mm a year.
- Select sites with free draining soil.
- Use a paddock system that has sufficient spare capacity to move pig units as soon as risk of soil erosion occurs.
- Maintain good vegetation cover, for example by under-sowing cereals.
- Use straw to protect wet and bare soils.
- Reduce stocking rates.
- Maintain access tracks and direct any run-off into grassed areas.
- Provide permanent grass (beetle banks) or hedge buffers at strategic points, e.g. below tracks and along watercourses, to settle sediment and associated nutrients.
- Move gateways to avoid or minimise direct run-off onto highways.
- Ensure the border of the unit is at least 10m away from watercourses, and 50m away from wells or boreholes supplying human drinking water.
- Position feeding areas away from watercourses.

Remember

- Improved management of outdoor pigs can reduce costs, help improve pig welfare, improve production and reduce the risk of soil erosion, run-off and watercourse pollution on your farm.
- Choose free-draining soils on gentle slopes in areas of low rainfall. Aim to maintain ground cover, particularly in winter, to protect your soils from erosion and run-off.