



Market and policy issues

- The supply and price of feed grains and soya bean meal fluctuates widely and exerts a very significant impact on the profitability of pigmeat production. Demand for pigmeat worldwide continues to increase, but increases in production have been curtailed by periods of very high feed prices that have led to reductions in breeding pig numbers.
- Currently, imports of pigmeat into the European Union (EU) are quite insignificant in terms of EU pigmeat production. Within the EU overall, sow numbers have been in decline.
- The decline in sow numbers will result in a somewhat smaller reduction in pig supplies, due to the higher output per sow of the remaining herds.
- The EU export market for pigmeat is growing at a phenomenal rate due to continued high exports to China as a result of the African Swine Fever (ASF) problem there.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reports indicate that Chinese supply will not get back to pre-ASF levels until 2025, and that nominal prices at world level are expected to stay strong until 2025 at least.
- However, the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic showed the fragility of markets to such outbreaks, with a reduction in pig prices due to reduced access to markets, despite market demand.
- Despite significant imports of pigmeat annually, Ireland is a net exporter of pigmeat and of live pigs, exporting 55% of production (254,000t of pigmeat, worth €941m in 2019).

Shape and size of the sector in 2027

There are circa 300 commercial pig farms in Ireland with a total breeding herd of just under 145,000 sows. The average size of a commercial sow herd is 500 sows.

Proposed improvements in production:

- increase sow productivity from 27 to 28 pigs produced per sow per year; and,
- improve weaning to sale feed conversion efficiency (FCE: kg feed required to produce 1kg live weight) from 2.44 to 2.35 (see **Table 1**).

Targets proposed for the pig production sector

Two key performance indicators are identified:

- sow productivity; improvements will come from an increase in the number of piglets born alive per litter, while maintaining low piglet mortality rates; and,
- FCE; improvements in FCE are required to reduce production costs. Factors that will influence this include diet formulations, feeding strategies, type and sequences of diets fed, genetics, and alternative ingredients.

Environmental implications

- The density of pig production in Ireland is not a constraint on the expansion of production within the existing environmental regulations. The environmental impact of any increase in production can be substantially offset by improvements in feed formulation and efficiency at farm level.
- The national sow herd has remained static in recent years but the output per sow is increasing in terms of the number of pigs per sow per year, and live weight of pigs sold.
- Pig slurry is a valuable fertiliser that offers the opportunity to make savings on chemical fertiliser purchases. At present, 1,000 gallons is worth over €25 in nutrient value (€5.59 per m³) based on current fertiliser prices. To save money, farmers need to maximise the allowance of pig slurry their farm may use at the start of the year by effective nutrient management planning.
- In the current climate, more focus needs to be given to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) and ammonia emissions. This can be aided by investigating lower-protein diets (targetting a reduction of 1% in weaner diets and 2% in finisher diets), housing management and the potential of certain feed ingredients to reduce emissions.

Research and knowledge transfer actions

- Conduct relevant pig research in the areas of nutrition (to achieve an average FCE of 2.35 from weaning to sale), health and welfare (including reducing antibiotic usage and rearing pigs with intact tails), environment, pig management and genetics at Teagasc Moorepark.
- Farmers need to investigate the use of energy-efficient technologies, e.g., LED lighting, solar pv, and air to water and biomass heating systems.



- Conduct research to investigate reducing protein levels in pig diets.
- Promote the use of pig slurry as a fertiliser through effective nutrient management planning.
- Highlight how pig production fits into the circular economy; grass and tillage farms using pig slurry to produce milk and cereals; cereals fed to pigs to produce pork.
- Increase the number of producers (target 70% of national herd) that fully participate in the Teagasc eProfit Monitor herd recording system and benchmark herd performance.
- Produce more pigmeat from less feed: the Teagasc eProfit Monitor programme will monitor the target of two tonnes of pigmeat to be produced from seven tonnes of feed.
- Continue farm visits to deal with specific farm issues.
- Expand pig discussion groups.
- Provide focused workshops for pig producers and staff, both at central locations and on farm for larger herds.

- Continue delivery of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) pig courses and support the development and delivery of apprenticeship courses in pig farming.
- Develop and increase the use of digital methods (e.g., *The Pig Edge* podcast, Let's Talk Pigs webinars, infographics) of communication and knowledge transfer.
- Promote the use of the Teagasc-developed economic model for Irish pig production.
- Strengthen links and collaborations between stakeholders.

Comment

There are a number of key issues for pig producers in Ireland at present:

- the threat of African Swine Fever entering Ireland;
- the high level of feed credit on some farms;
- antimicrobial resistance (AMR): increased focus on reducing the use of antibiotics and zinc oxide;
- the challenge of transitioning to rearing pigs with undocked tails; and,
- the choice of sustainable infrastructure when investing in and renovating pig facilities, which will have the greatest economic benefit.

Contact

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The road map for pigs is available on www.teagasc.ie.

Table 1: Current performance and targets for 2027.

Sectoral average	Current	Target 2027	Top 10% of producers 2027
Number of pigs produced/sow/year	26.8	28.00	30.00
Feed conversion weaning to sale	2.44	2.35	2.30
Pigmeat/sow/year (tonne)	2.32	2.40	2.61
Total feed/sow/year (tonne)	8.31	8.40	8.90
Herd FCE	3.58	3.50	3.40