

Pigs ain't Pigs

Because of the increased interest in pasture raised pork by consumers, heritage breed pigs are once again being recognised as a great choice in pastured management systems.

Pigs come in two essential types—the **lard type** and the **bacon type**.

Traditional Bacon pigs are used in small scale production of fresh meat, cured hams and bacon. We chose both size scales in the Wessex Saddleback and the Large Black.



Wessex Saddleback

Wessex Saddleback pigs are both prolific and hardy, and do well as an outdoor pig – being bred originally as a specialist bacon producer. They have excellent milking capacity with the ability to rear large litters. Very social pigs, Wessex Saddleback's are easy to keep and surprisingly happy to imagine they are part of the family and behave more like well loved dogs than farm yard animals.

The Wessex is regarded as an excellent eating pig, traditionally used as a "baconer" and grown out for compact roasting joints and hams.

An ideal smaller pig, the Wessex is well suited to small acreage production and the traditional dry curing that produces the tastiest hams and smallgoods.



Although the Wessex Saddleback was a popular pig in Australia for many years, like so many outdoor and black breeds, it lost favour with the change in rearing methods and market demands, and had become rare in this country by the 1980s. As the breed no longer exists in its country of origin and global population numbers are fewer than 100, The **Wessex Saddleback pigs** remaining in Australia are now considered the only remaining genetically pure Wessex Saddleback pigs on the planet.

The Large Black

Also known as the Devon pig, originating in Cornwall England, the Large Black is well suited for outdoor pig production with its efficient grazing abilities and black skin and hair protecting it from sunburn. They are renowned for their exceptionally placid temperament and maternal instincts, the sows produce large volumes of milk to feed their piglets off natural grazing. With approximately 60 registered breeding sows in Australia this breed is critically endangered.



Selected for large size and well marbled flavoursome meat the large black is a great choice for healthy natural pork production. They have a very wide body (GREAT bacon rashers!) and lean hock and shoulder joints.

The Large Black was particularly noted as a pig well adapted for outdoor life, not being susceptible to sunburn, and doing well on grazing alone. And it was a producer of good bacon.

It was these latter attributes in particular that led to its introduction and spread outside Britain, at a time when many farmers, regardless of their principal farming interest, kept one or two baconers as a sideline and wanted them to be as easy care as possible. Its docility also made the Large Black popular as a backyard pig.

Like many livestock breeds kept almost solely for eating, the Large Black has been affected by changes in fashion with respect to food as well as the new management techniques used to produce it. Today's Supermarket clientele demands that its pork has white meat and that both pork and bacon have light-coloured skin. The pork of the Large Black tends to be somewhat darker than that of white breeds, and while it does have a pink skin, any remnants of hair which remain on it after processing show up strongly as a sort of five o'clock shadow. The skin of all pigs is 'processed' in precisely the same way at the abattoir, however the myth remains that white hairs are less visible, and if they do show are apparently less gastronomically displeasing.

The breeds preference for a free-ranging habitat is not suitable for the intensive, shed-rearing methods used by today's pig-producers.

The Large Black has survived in this country primarily only because of its fast natural growth and large size, being valued for commercial crossing, primarily with the white skinned European and Japanese breeds. This cross yielded great hybrid vigour, and it was well regarded commercially.

Current demand for meat produced from traditional breeds of pigs raised naturally is now promoting a growth in the number of breeders keeping Large Blacks as this particular breed is much appreciated for its succulent taste and eating quality.



As with most rare breeds of livestock, the survival and future success of the Large Black pig is today in the hands of a few dedicated enthusiasts who believe in the importance of preserving genetic diversity.

Lard Pigs, as the name suggests, produce higher concentrations of fat, which traditionally was rendered for cooking and the production of lubricants. Through the end of World War II, the market for lard (a key ingredient in products ranging from cosmetics to explosives to pharmaceuticals) was strong, but after the war, cheaper vegetable-based fats found their way into western diets and petrochemicals largely replaced lard for commercial and industrial uses. The declining market for lard caused demand for lard pigs to collapse and breeders began selecting for leaner hogs. We think of these animals as the Wagyu of Pork, and certainly the Japanese agree valuing 'Kurobuta' above all other pork meat.

The Berkshire

They are a prick eared breed, all black except for white feet, a white blaze on the face and a white brush on the end of the tail. They're hardy, they have good mothering capabilities and they perform very well outdoors, especially when grazing on pasture. Their meat is darker than commercial pork and far more flavourful than the pork found in your supermarket or most butcher shops in Australia. They have played a major part in the Australian pig industry producing high quality ham and bacon and often used in cross breeding programs.



Initially the Berkshires thrived, thanks largely to their exceptionally tasty meat, but as the pork industry consolidated under the control of just a handful of large corporations in the 1980s and 1990s, and efficiency of production became the name of the game, the Berkshire population plummeted.

The "pork industry" simply wasn't interested in Berkshires because they were slower growing, didn't produce as much lean meat (which the industry believed was the only thing consumers would buy) and didn't perform as well in confinement as the Duroc, Hampshire and Yorkshire breeds. They have undergone a recent resurgence due to the popularity of Berkshire pork in Japan. Even so, their numbers are still critically low. Berkshire pork, prized for

juiciness, flavor and tenderness, is pink-hued and heavily marbled. Its high fat content makes it suitable for long cooking and high-temperature cooking and Kurobuta, which is 100 percent Berkshire meat, is much prized by the Japanese. Part of the preference, which goes back more than 300 years, is cultural. The Japanese have always preferred dark meat from black pigs because it is seen as healthy and healing - you wouldn't go there and promote 'the other white meat'!

We chose Berkshire pigs because of their superior taste, quiet nature and suitability to free range. They produce marbled meat that contains good fat that breaks down in the cooking process, enhancing the flavour and tenderness-you get a nice edge of light fat and a little marbling, so it has good, juicy flavour throughout. Berkshire pigs are compact, with thick muscling, short legs and deep bodies. All in all, if you are looking for a good pig for a small-farm enterprise or you just want to eat your own pork like Grandpa used to raise, then the Berkshire might be the breed for you.

