

THE FRESH TASTE OF PORK By Kate Glastetter

Hard to beat the taste of fresh pork. It seems to taste even better when you know firsthand what exactly went into producing said pork. But let's face it, growing hogs to produce pork can be a challenge, especially when said hogs are 300lb by 6 months and root like they are going to China! That's where the Kunekune pig comes in. Kunekune pigs are so much more than just hairy, cute, roly poly hogs. Sure they are exceptionally gentle and full of character, but these friendly pigs are prime pork producers too! Don't let their small size fool you, the pork produced is flavorful and well worth the slower growth rate. But just how does one get started producing Kunekune pork? Well first, if at all possible, I suggest finding a Kunekune pork producer and buying some Kunekune pork from them, so you can taste for yourself just how great the pork really is. I'd become buddies with this Kunekune pork producer, if you could, because it always pays to have a mentor to ask for advice when you need it. Once you've eaten the mouthwatering pork that comes from these small but tasty pigs, you'll need to buy some Kunekune pigs of your own. Now you can choose to buy barrows to raise and butcher or you can go all in and buy breeding stock to produce your very own bacon seeds. Obviously buying breeding stock and raising their offspring for pork is the long route. Buying some 8 week old barrows to raise for pork will get you said pork faster. Either way I strongly suggest buying from responsible breeders of registered stock. When buying meat barrows it's not necessary to buy them registered but I'd ask to see the registered papers of the barrows sire and dam just to make sure they are in fact full blood Kunekune pigs. It would defeat the purpose if the pigs weren't even pure Kunekune pigs. When buying breeding stock I strongly recommend buying registered breeders. Those papers guarantee you have full blood Kunekune stock, not to mention the society behind them, always there to support you in your Kunekune endeavors. If you don't bother with registered stock you have no way of knowing just what you are getting into. But papers and pedigrees aren't everything. Be sure to pick breeding stock from a farm that raises them as closely to the way you plan to raise your own. Finding pigs thriving in a similar operation to the one you are planning will ensure the animals will fit in nicely at your place when you bring them home. Always look for pigs of good conformation. Well balanced pigs with straight backs and strong pasterns will produce for porkers for years to come. Also think about size of the sire and dam. For pork production I recommend Kunekune pigs on the larger side, say 250lb plus. If at all possible visit the sire and dam of the animals you are interested in. See the operation, meet the breeder, and get up close and personal with the pigs in question. I understand that this is not always possible when buying Kunekune pigs. In the case that you can't visit the farm, get as many pictures of the sire and dam and pigs as possible, from all different angles. Get to know the breeder and keep an open line of communication up between you two when available. This could really come in handy when you need advice. Never be afraid to ask questions. If a breeder isn't willing to share info about their pigs and what kind of operation they are running, do you really want to do business with them? Once you've made your choice on either meat barrows or breeding stock, it's time to bring them home! Now this is not the time to rush around quickly throwing together a pen and shelter. You should have that built weeks before your pigs ever step foot on your place. They will need pasture and a hog hut to be comfortable. Of course it doesn't have to be fancy, pigs aren't picky critters, but it needs to be secure and have all the necessities. A source of fresh water, shade from the sun, a wallow to escape the heat, or draft free shelter if its winter, are just some of the basics. Fence is also important. Pigs taken from their home and put in a strange new place without their family around can become very upset and may try to escape and try to find their way back

home. It's important to have a tight fence at least until the pigs get used to their new home and realize this is where they belong now. Meat barrows are pretty simple, just feed them until they reach the size you want for butchering. I recommend allowing them as much pasture access as possible and supplementing with produce. However it's important to remember that younger pigs need a lot of nutrients and vitamins to grow properly, so if your pasture is lacking, and you don't have much produce to pick up the slack, I strongly suggest finding a well-balanced weaner ration, preferably in pellet form. A word of warning though, processed feeds are a great way to get morbidly obese Kunekune pigs fast so feed in moderation of course. Breeding animals require more work and time before you get the end result, pork. Say you buy a breeding pair, if you keep the boar with the sow year round be prepared for at least two litters of piglets a year. The average Kunekune litter size is 6 piglets, so before long you'll be overflowing with bacon seeds! Of course if you buy the breeding stock as piglets themselves, be prepared to sit tight and wait. Kunekune pigs rarely reach sexually maturity before 6 months old and most won't breed a gilt before she's 12 months old, to ensure she's fully grown before becoming pregnant. Whatever you decide I suggest having at least two separate pig pastures so you can keep the boar from breeding the female too early or too often. If you buy piglets be sure to have a secure, safe, draft free shelter for them, especially if it's during the colder months. Piglets can get pneumonia easily when stressed from transport to a new home, so keep them draft free. If at all possible I suggest bringing home a bag of the same kind of feed they were eating at their original home so they won't have to suddenly adjust to a completely different feed. A great thing about pigs is they travel extremely well. When housing breeding stock you'll need to set up a farrowing area for the sow, this could be as simple as an A-frame portable hog hut or as elaborate as a fancy insulated barn stall. I strongly recommend, no matter what farrowing setup you choose, to have a creep area that just the piglets can fit into that has a heat lamp (if it's cold) and crush rails along all solid walls. These crush rails allow piglets to slip away to safety so they don't get smashed between their sow and the solid wall, when mama lays down. It's up to you if the boar will be staying with the sow all year round and even through farrowing and raising the piglets. I prefer to keep my boar separate from my sows unless I need him for breeding purposes, but I know of many that simply let the whole herd run together. The newborn litter's safety should be of utmost importance when making the choice whether to let the boar remain with the sow through farrowing. Little piglets don't get around very well for the first couple of weeks and can be easily accidentally stepped on or crushed by a 300lb boar. Sows are pregnant for about three months, three weeks, and three days, and farrow at 3:00 in the morning, in 3 degree cold (; that's a little joke there amongst us pig people). I prefer to have litters March through May, that's when it's the nicest out around here. Depending on your location you may prefer to farrow in the summer or if you have mild winters you could farrow then. Just remember that sow will be feeding growing piglets for at least 8 weeks so she'll need plenty of pasture and produce to support her and the hungry litter, if pasture and produce can't be provided you'll have to find a balanced sow ration to supplement her diet. Don't forget that by three weeks old those piglets will be tasting their sows feed, imitating mama. I start providing the piglets with a weaner ration in their creep area. The sow can't get to the feed since it's in the creep area, allowing the piglets to help themselves. By five weeks old the litter should be munching on pasture and produce right alongside their sow and consuming weaner ration frequently. Starting the piglets on solid foods will make weaning at 8 weeks much easier on them. Most people wean at 8 weeks, and if you plan to breed back your sow soon for another litter I recommend weaning at 8 weeks. This should allow the sow to gain some more body condition if she has gotten drawn down from nursing her latest litter, before breeding her again. Personally I prefer to leave the piglets with their sow for as long as

possible. Mine tend to wean their piglets themselves by time they are 3 months old. I just like the way piglets grow off when allowed to stay on sow's milk for longer. Once you have weaned pigs in the grower pasture you're one step closer to having pork in the freezer! Don't get in a hurry though, Kunekune pigs are slow to mature. Be prepared to pasture them and provide them with produce when necessary until they are ready to butcher. At what age you butcher will depend on what size you are wanting them at time of processing. We prefer to butcher at 12 to 15 months old, but I know others who wait longer or some who butcher roasters at just 8 months. I like ours to be around 150lb for processing. We do all our own butchering right here on the farm, so a heavier pig isn't always for the best. If you are feeling adventurous and want to process the hogs yourself, I recommend finding someone local that does their own butchering and asking if you can observe and even help on some of their butchering. Hands on is a great way to learn butchering. If that's not possible I'd befriend someone who does it themselves and talk their ear off, ask questions and get a feel for the process before diving head first into it. YouTube is great for watching how it's done step by step. I know not everyone is up for butchering their hogs themselves and that's totally ok, there are plenty of licensed facilities around that you can haul your pigs to for processing. You don't have to do the deed yourself, but you still get the tasty pork, not to mention the satisfaction of knowing that animal was raised kindly by your own hand.