



FREE-RANGE PORK PRODUCTION

THE OPPORTUNITY

In recent years, a focus on the welfare of pigs has raised public awareness and increased demand for free-range pork. A number of pork producers, existing and new, have committed to provide consumer choice in the retail market and are moving to free-range farming systems. However, published information was piecemeal, inconsistent and there was no agreed definition of “free-range”.

This project set out to describe best practice in free-range pork production.

RESULTS

Six free-range New Zealand pig farms were visited and good practices documented. The following key aspects were covered: environment (soil type, rainfall, topography; housing, nutrition, feeding, stocking rates, health, husbandry, resource consent requirements, and management (of soil cover and waste run-off).

Benefits of free-range pork production were defined as:

- » fewer manure handling issues
- » capital outlay is lower if land is available
- » maintaining, conditioning and adding nutrients to the soil
- » flexible system that can be altered to suit requirements and conditions
- » some aspects of animal welfare can be managed differently
- » can suit more robust genotype of pig
- » ability to grow and feed root crops
- » market advantage in being able to differentiate free-range pork.

There are also a number of challenges associated with free-range farming which this project addressed.

The pork industry developed an agreed definition of “free-range” pig farming – essentially it means pigs can run around outside for their entire life. The full definition and the best-practice guidelines are available on the NZ Pork website: <http://www.nzpork.org.nz/PorkProduction.aspx>

The development of the guidelines and definition means a free-range component can be added to the PigCare welfare audit programme.

AT A GLANCE

SFF project	11/133 Free-range pork production
SFF investment	\$12 000 (GST incl)
Other contributors	Massey University, NZ Pork, Pig farmers, Harmony Foods, SPCA
Total project value (excluding in-kind contributions): \$30,000	

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