Irrigated Pastures for Hogs

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IRRIGATED PASTURES FOR HOGS


Up to 85% of the pork consumed in Washington is shipped in. Washington producers could raise many more hogs than they do by using available feed grains along with good pasture. Irrigated pasture for hogs is a good investment.

Pasture lowers pork production costs. It can reduce the concentrate requirements for a breeding herd by 75% and for sows and pigs by 20%. Fattening pigs on pasture require 15% less concentrates.

Hogs make good gains on pasture. Daily gains for fattening pigs in drylot were 1.75 pounds per day, on pasture plus corn—1.48 pounds per day, and on pasture plus corn and protein—1.60 pounds per day.

Good pasture is nutritious. Top-quality legume pasture is high in protein and vitamins and needs only concentrates to provide a balanced ration.

Swine sanitation improves on pasture. On properly managed pasture, swine diseases and parasites are easier to control.

Irrigated pasture is a labor saver. When the producer is busiest managing the irrigation and other farm activities, his hogs need the least attention.

Hog production fits in well with other farm enterprises. Hogs require little pasture compared with other livestock. Cash row crops or cash hay programs are good combinations with hogs.

Cash outlay for hogs is small compared with that needed for other livestock.

Establishing the Pasture

Pasture can be established either in the spring or fall. A good practice is to harvest a crop of wheat, oats, barley, peas, or early potatoes and then make a later summer seeding. If spring seedings are made, most of the growing season is used in establishing the pasture.

For hog pasture, select land that is well-drained so that good sanitation can be maintained. Poorly drained land or shallow, rocky soils do not permit growing ladino clover and alfalfa, the two best legumes for hog pastures.

Pure stands of ladino clover or alfalfa are recommended for hog pastures. Excess alfalfa can be made into good quality hay, but it is rather difficult to make hay from excess ladino clover. Pigs will "root" more in excess ladino clover than in alfalfa.

Seed 3 pounds of ladino clover or 15 pounds of alfalfa per acre. Irrigate the field before seeding. Pre-irrigation assures enough soil moisture and makes it possible to prepare a good seedbed.

Fertilizers

Use a soil test and Fertilizer Guide (FG) 3 to determine needs for phosphorus, potassium, zinc, and boron. Plow down these fertilizers or work them in during seedbed preparation. They may be top dressed in the fall when adequate amounts have not been applied for the life of the stand.

The value of the soil test for sulfur is questionable. If sulfur is known to be deficient, apply sulfur fertilizer at a rate that will supply 40 pounds of sulfur per acre. Areas irrigated with water from most of the major streams east of the Cascade Mountains will usually not require sulfur because of the high content in the water. Exceptions are the Roza area and the upper Yakima Valley.

Nitrogen deficiency is rare in properly inoculated legumes. Application of 30 to 40 pounds per acre is a common practice on new seedings. Advisability of applying nitrogen on established stands of legumes is questionable.
Management

Irrigated pasture for hogs should be grazed every other year. During alternate years, fields may be used as hay or pasture for other livestock. Yearly rotation helps control parasites—primarily roundworms.

The fields used for pasture each year should be large enough to permit the ladino clover to grow to 6 to 8 inches and alfalfa 10 to 12 inches before grazing. This usually means one more pasture is necessary with alfalfa than with ladino clover. Graze alfalfa before it reaches the bud stage. Otherwise, considerable forage is lost by trampling and overmaturity. (With enough pasture, you can start grazing pastures earlier in the spring, then move to a new pasture in a shorter time on the first rotation period.) In the fall, remove the hogs soon enough for the pasture to grow 6 inches. This growth will protect the pasture during the winter and build up reserves to start growing in the spring. If pigs are left on too long in the fall, “rooting” becomes a serious problem.

Carrying Capacity

A good irrigated pasture will carry 10 to 15 sows per acre. Irrigated pasture will carry the same number of sows with litters. During the peak growing season, in early spring to about the middle of June, 25 to 35 finishing hogs can be carried on 1 acre of good irrigated pasture.

Irrigation

After removing pigs, irrigate the pastures. Do not irrigate while the pastures are being grazed. The pasture surface should not be wet when the hogs are turned in to graze.

Weed Control

Clipping for weed control may be necessary. It is not necessary to clip the plants close to the ground, but they should be clipped to prevent seed formation.

Excess Forage

Excess forage can be used as hay or silage, or grazed by other livestock. Hogs can be followed by dry ewes or stocker cattle without damaging the pastures.

Hog Feeding and Management

Rations for hogs on good legume pastures can be very simple. Pastures will prevent any vitamin deficiencies and will greatly aid in meeting the protein requirements. Legume pastures are also very rich in calcium.

The breeding herd can obtain about 75% of its total nutritional needs from good legume pastures during the grazing season. It is advisable to supply small amounts of a good animal protein in addition to a little grain to the breeding herd on pasture. To avoid excessive feeding and to get the most value from legume pastures, hand feed the breeding herd. A suitable ration follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feed</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corn, sorghum, and/or barley</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish meal (herring meal, 70% grade)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat meal (55% grade)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iodized salt</td>
<td>1</td>
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Coarse grind corn and sorghum and either roll or grind oats and barley. Corn, sorghum, or barley, or a combination of these grains, may be used. Three to four pounds per day of the suggested ration is sufficient for a brood sow or boar on good legume pasture. Good hog management calls for daily inspection of all animals and at that time the small quantity of ration can be fed.

Sows that are especially thin after weaning can be kept separate for several weeks and fed an additional 2 to 3 pounds per day before being placed with other breeding hogs. Adjust the amount of concentrates to feed at any time during the gestation period according to the condition of the sows.

Sows with litters on pasture should be self-fed or hand fed all they will eat two or three times daily. Hand feed lactating sows until their pigs are about 10 days old. Here is a suitable ration for lactating sows on good legume pastures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feed</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corn, sorghum, and/or barley</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat middlings</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish meal (herring meal, 70% grade)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat meal (55% grade)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iodized salt</td>
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Suckling pigs that are receiving enough milk from their dams will usually eat additional feed from the self-feeder and the pasture when the suggested ration is fed. If the sow is hand fed, the pigs should be fed in a creep. The same ration fed to the sow can be fed to the pigs when they are receiving enough milk. If the sow is a poor milker or if she
has an exceptionally large litter, feed the pigs abundant buttermilk, skim milk, or another high-quality dairy by-product in addition to the dry ration. If such supplements are not available, the following ration may be fed in a creep:

**Feed**

Ground corn, barley, and/or sorghum 74%
Tankage, meat meal, fish meal, and/or dried skim milk 10%
Soybean, cottonseed, and/or linseed meal 16%

**Growing and Finishing** hogs weighing more than 75 pounds make excellent gains on good legume pastures when fed ground corn in a self-feeder. However, faster gains can be produced if the hogs are given a protein supplement free-choice. The increased rate and efficiency of gains will compensate for the cost of the protein.

A satisfactory protein supplement for young growing-finishing hogs on good legume pasture is equal parts of meat meal (55% grade), fish meal (70% grade Alaskan herring), and soybean meal. Add 1 pound of iodized salt to each 100 pounds of supplement.

Hogs sometimes don’t eat enough meat meal, fish meal, or mixture of the two, even though the quality of protein is high. It usually will pay to include some vegetable protein to increase palatability. Cottonseed meal, linseed meal, or ground cull peas are as good supplements as soybean meal.

A continuous supply of good water is more important for hogs than any other class of farm animals. Usually, automatic waterers of good design are the best way of supplying sufficient water.

**Minerals**

Hogs don’t usually need mineral supplements when they are grazing good legume pastures and receiving rations like those described. Salt and iodine, however, must be supplied in sufficient amounts. Include salt in the ration or feed free-choice in a feeder that is protected from the weather, especially sunshine and rain.

**Shade**

Adequate shade is a necessity for hogs. They may become severely sunburned, even during the cool spring months. During the summer, shade is essential protection against both high temperatures and sunlight. Hogs will spend nearly all day in the shade during the summer, coming out to graze, eat, and drink from the late afternoon until early morning.

**Prevent Rooting**

Ring hogs’ noses before putting them out to graze ladino clover and other shallow-rooted forage plants. When they have sufficient forage of good quality, hogs do not usually “root” excessively.

**Wallows**

Wallows are recommended only when they can be kept reasonably clean. This means that a wallow should be constructed of concrete and an adequate supply of water kept available. Wallows that are merely dugouts often become too large and may destroy pasture. Adequate shade and plenty of good drinking water are satisfactory substitutes for a wallow.