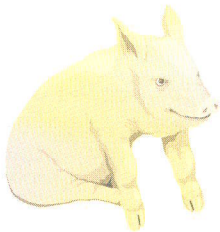


# Spotlight on Agriculture

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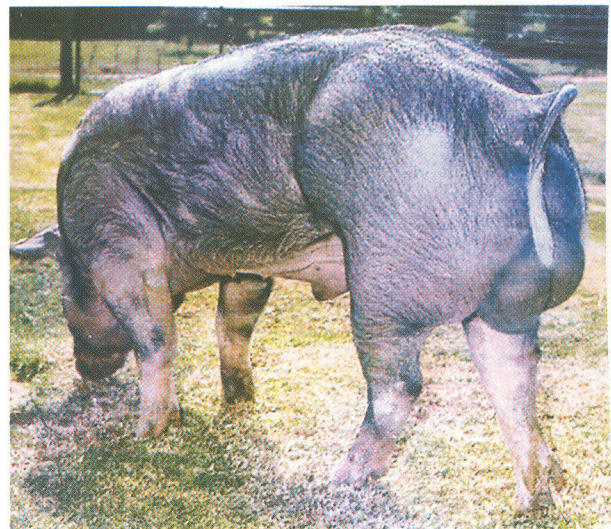
## Pigs - Is a pig a pig?

*It is well known that a cow is not a cow, for the one produces beef, the other milk and another is dual purpose. A goat is not a goat, for the one produces hair, the other meat and another milk. A sheep is not a sheep, for one produces wool, the other meat and another is dual purpose and a chicken is not a chicken, for the one is a layer and the other a broiler chicken. Is a pig a pig? Are not all the breeds being used in weaner, bacon or pork production, depending on the age and weight of the pig?*

No, a pig is not a pig, for over time breeds have been developed for specific purposes or traits. With the intensification of production the traditional grazing breeds have all but vanished, and were replaced by breeds or types selected for high growth rate and lean body mass for the pressure from the medical professions against fat, has changed the consumer preferences.

With the changes in consumer preferences, the industry moved from pure breeding to cross breeding. Landrace x Large White is the predominant cross for producing sows, which are then mated to Duroc boars, a breed known for lean meat production.

The low profit margin in the pig industry has led breeders to look for other breeds with which they can crossbreed in order to improve productivity, efficiency of production, and thus profitability. This has led to the importation of the Pietrain; a breed from Belgium, renowned for its exceptional hams and broad backs. In cross breeding programs the Pietrain boars have outperformed all other breeds.



**Figure 1. A Pietrain boar showing its heavy muscling and hams**

In Africa, and for that matter, Namibia, the largest portion of the pig population consists of indigenous breeds.

**How do the indigenous pig breeds compare with commercial pig breeds, and can they still play a role in Agriculture?**

The indigenous pigs of Africa are unique; they have survived under some of the most hostile environments, a classical case of survival of the fittest.



The indigenous pig breeds were never subjected to selection for growth and lean body mass. Thus they have low growth rates and deposit fat very quickly. This is not necessarily a disadvantage, for under the normal system of rearing in rural communities, the pigs have to fend for themselves. During times of food scarcity they rely on their body reserves for survival.

The nutritional status under which these pigs are kept has influenced the mature size of the animals. They are much smaller than pigs of the different commercial breeds, and thus have lower maintenance requirements, which enables them to survive under harsh conditions.

The process of natural selection for survival of the fittest, resulted in animals that can utilize a high fibre, low protein/energy diet.

Though never selected for fertility, these indigenous pigs are highly fertile. Under traditional systems of rearing, sows farrow at least once a year. Results obtained at Mashari Research Station have indicated that with the correct nutritional regime and weaning at eight weeks of age, these indigenous sows can produce two litters of piglets per annum. Litter size varies from four to eleven piglets. Survival of piglets during the first few days after birth is highly dependant on the condition of the sow, and thus milk production of the sow.

**Table 1. Average mass of indigenous breeding of yearling and mature boars and sows.**

	Yearling	Mature
<b>Boars</b>	57.64kg	141.95kg
<b>Sows</b>	52.76kg	84.44kg

Table 1 indicates the low mature mass of indigenous pigs. Their commercial counterparts weigh on average 350kg when fully grown.

**Table 2. Average birth-, weaning mass and Average Daily Gain (ADG) of indigenous piglets born at Mashari Research Station (n=27)**

Sex	Birth	Weaning	ADG
<b>Boars</b>	2.05kg	11.24kg	164.1g/d
<b>Sows</b>	1.78kg	11.89kg	174.5g/d

The poorer growth rate of the males was due to two litters, consisting of males only, which were born to young sows, which struggled to raise their litters.

Though the indigenous pigs cannot compete with the commercial pig breeds, in the normal commercial sector, they have a role to play.

Namibia, like the rest of the Southern African Countries, is a netto importer of lard. Should the indigenous pigs be utilized to capacity, they could provide in a large portion of the need for lard, especially to the game industry that uses lard in meat processing.

If value adding to the product is considered, the income generated from selling meat of indigenous pigs could be easily tripled, especially selling of crackling generates an income.

The indigenous pigs have darker, tastier meat than commercial breeds. This could mean that a niche market for this type of meat, especially ham, could be developed.



**Figure 2. An example of indigenous pigs**

Thus, as the saying goes: "There are horses for courses." The right horse must be found for the right course. The same principle applies for pigs. The indigenous pigs have a role to play in the pig industry; they should be utilized correctly.