



SPOTLIGHT on AGRICULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The pig industry in Namibia is very small, with a total number of approximately 40 000 pigs. As in most African countries, the largest portion of the pig population in Namibia consists of indigenous pigs. More than 50% of the pig population in Namibia, is found in the Northern Communal Areas, and are indigenous pigs. The origin of this breed is unsure, possibly from the areas surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, and it migrated down through Africa during the human migration.

Today, these pigs are found mostly in the Kavango, Oshana, Oshikoto, Omusati and Ohangwena Regions. Small numbers of indigenous pigs are found in the Caprivi and Kunene Regions. Due to the fact that pigs compete with humans for the same food, many communal farmers view them as livestock for the richer farmers who can afford to buy feed. Pork is highly favoured and farmers often buy young pigs during good years, fatten them, and sell them for cash.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIGENOUS PIGS

- Adapted to harsh environments
- Fertile
- Low maintenance requirements
- Tasty meat
- Excellent lard producers
- Outstanding scroungers for food

The indigenous pigs found in Namibia are characterized by a long snout and relatively long and lean body. Body color is mostly mottled brown, black and white, but uniform solid colors also do occur.

The indigenous pigs were never subjected to selection for growth, litter size and lean body mass. Thus they have low growth rates and deposit fat very quickly. This is a survival mechanism, for under the rearing system used in the communal areas the pigs have to fend for themselves. During times of food scarcity they rely on their body reserves for survival.



Typical litter of indigenous pigs being reared under improved conditions

The nutritional status under which these pigs are kept has influenced their mature size. They are smaller than commercial pig breeds, have lower maintenance requirements, and the process of survival of the fittest, resulted in animals that can utilize a high fibre, low protein/energy diet.

The meat is darker and tastier than the meat of commercial breeds. Namibia, like the other Southern African Countries, is a net importer of lard. If value adding to the product could be done, e.g. selling of crackling, the income generated, could be more than doubled.



An indigenous sow (Farmer's Weekly)

TRADITIONAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Traditionally pigs are kept in one of two ways; either penned in small enclosures made of wooden poles planted closely together, and fed the household scrap, or as free-ranging where they scrounge for their food. The latter system is prevalent in the riverine and Oshona areas. As pigs are unable to sweat, it is important that shade and water should always be provided, especially in the hot dry areas.



A mature breeding sow under conditions of improved management (Farmer's Weekly)

RESEARCH RESULTS

Though the indigenous pigs were never selected for fertility, they are highly fertile. Under traditional rearing systems, sows farrow on average once a year, towards the end or after the rainy season. Results obtained at Mashare Agricultural Development Institute have indicated that with improved management and nutrition, and weaning at eight weeks of age, indigenous sows can produce two litters per annum. Litter sizes vary from four to eleven. This is due to no selection for litter size. Survival of the piglets the first few days after birth is highly dependent on the milk production of the sow, and thus the condition of the sow.

Age at first farrowing is dependent on body condition of the sows. Age at first farrowing varies from 315 - 679 days. Average inter farrowing period varies from 173 - 388 days. Table 1 is a summary of on-station weights of piglets born between 1997 and 1999.

Table 1. On-station weights of piglets born between 1997 and 1999.

		Birth	Wean	6-Month
Boars	Summer	1.69	14.36	46.11
	Winter	1.39	9.77	50.96
Sows	Summer	1.31	13.11	51.26
	Winter	1.35	8.69	58.00

Season and year of birth, have significant influences on mass at different ages.

Table 2 is a summary of on-farm masses of piglets in participating communities. All these piglets were born during the summer.

Table 2. On-farm weights of piglets born during 1999.

	Birth	Wean	6-Month
Boars	1.1	4.35	10.42
Sows	0.98	4.2	10.28

The much lower masses at different ages, for the on-farm animals, are due mainly to poorer nutrition.

Table 3. Average Daily Gain (kg/day) for piglets born between 1997 and 1999.

	ADG (Birth - Wean)		ADG (Wean - 6 Month)	
	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter
Boars	0.226	0.149	0.268	0.371
Sows	1	0.131	0.322	0.443

Average daily gain differs between sexes and season, emphasizing the influence of season of birth on growth. From Table 3 it is evident that the piglets have a relatively slow growth rate from birth until weaning, which increases between weaning and 6-months. Towards 12-months of age the growth rate slows down again.

These relatively small, hardy, low maintenance, stress tolerant pigs are ideally suited for pig production in the communal areas, and can even play a role in the commercial sector, in the production of lard.

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An indigenous pig (Farmer's Weekly)