**Pigs on Pasture :**

**A Look at Management and the Aftermath**

Pete Solis

Assistant Farm Director - Livestock

[psfc@hampshire.edu](mailto:psfc@hampshire.edu)

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Description of Experiment

Six groups of four pigs were placed under two styles of pasture management, rotational grazing and continuous grazing. Pig carcasses were analyzed for differences in quality. Soil samples were taken to assess differences in soil health and fertility. Forage samples were taken before and after pigs grazed to assess damage or improvement of pasture.

Preliminary Results

There were no real differences in carcass quality between the rotationally grazing and the continuously grazing pigs.

We haven’t yet done any statistical analysis on the soil tests or the forage samples, but based on looking at the field, it’s hard to see much of a difference in the resulting plants. The main difference I see is that the continually grazed sections have more bare spots and potholes. While we did move feed, water, and shelter to avoid potholes and moonscaping with all groups of pigs, the rotationally grazed paddocks showed far fewer bare spots and low areas.

Problems and What I’d Do Differently Next Time

Our main problem was the weather. A drought in the summer and fall last year delayed tillage and reseeding the pasture. A very wet spring delayed the tillage and reseeding even further. I’ve been seeing more unhelpful weeds that I would like to popping up in the pasture. I would hope that timely tractor work and reseeding would reduce the weed levels.

We also had a surprising number of rebellious escape artist pigs. Part of that was the difficulty in keeping all the fences well electrified in a very dry year.

If I were doing this experiment over, I would give each group of pigs some access to the woods. I feel that pigs greatly benefit from the woods. In the woods, pigs have shade, cooler temperatures and some novelty to fill their brains with. I think this would have lowered the number of escapes. I’d also put the pigs feed and water in the woods. We spent a lot of our labor moving feed, water, and shelter around. It would be nice to have been able to lower that figure.

So?

In terms of a management strategy, if you want to have fewer bare spots and potholes in your pig pasture, rotate. If you’re looking to save labor and infrastructure costs, don’t bother. Moving shelter and feed and water cuts down on potholes and moonscaping. If you’re looking to use pigs as a means of tillage, you’ll want a high stocking density and frequent movement and you still might need to use a tractor to even things out.

Current Pig Plans and Projects

We are currently building a breeding herd of Gloucestershire Old Spots. We have four sows and a boar.

I have a student who will be leading a class on pig management in the fall. Several faculty are interested in using the pigs in classes and for research in parasite loads and animal behavior.

We are currently running an experiment exploring the differences in farrowing sows given access to woodlands and sows that just have access to pasture.

Piglets that are not used in the Meat CSA or sent to the dining hall will be sold, either as breeding stock or as feeder pigs.

Thanks for coming to this workshop. If you have any other questions, pig-related or otherwise, we didn’t get to, feel free to email me. Enjoy the rest of the conference!