



Euro-toques Ireland

European Community of Chefs & Cooks

EURO-TOQUES FOOD FORUM & FAIR 2009 **'The Whole Hog: RE-examining how we rear, kill & eat pigs'** **Sunday 6th of September 2009**

PANEL BIOGS, SPEECH NOTES & QUOTES

FEARGAL O'DONNELL **Commissioner-General Euro-toques Ireland**

Welcomes, thank you etc.

Euro-toques charges itself with 'Protecting Culinary Heritage' and 'Promoting Local Sourcing'.

Protecting culinary heritage means resisting homogenisation and standardisation of food; it means protecting native plant varieties and animal breeds, maintaining traditional skills and regional specialities, promoting artisan production.

Promoting local sourcing means buying our food ingredients as close to home as possible and using what is available locally and, it follows, in season. This means knowing your producer and how they produce; this means a trust that can never ever be replaced by labels and paper trails. This is what we mean when we talk about 'traceability'.

We believe we have a responsibility not only to uphold these principles in our work but also to promote them more widely; to contribute to education and development, to encourage and support the best producers, to constantly raise the bar.

We hope over the coming years to focus on various food ingredients and sectors in turn, But one area that we felt needed urgent examination was pigs and pork production – so that is our focus today.

When we looked at pig production in Ireland we saw our principles under threat.

An animal and a food which was a central part of Irish culinary heritage – the gentleman who paid the rent – had become cheapened, uniform and tasteless. In the main, one or two hybrid varieties are being reared intensively indoors in identical conditions being fed uniform feeds. There is no hope, under these conditions, for differentiation, for improved quality and taste.

The level of concentration in the industry denies the possibility of local sourcing and all that it means. The dioxin crisis last December spoke volumes. Chefs, butchers, producers, farmers all keep a paper trails as long as your arm, going back years – we all incur the time and expense involved in keeping the records we are obliged to keep – yet, the one time we were asked to produce them, it meant nothing – all the pork, whether from an



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organic producer with strictly monitored inputs or a large commercial farmers personally sourcing and mixing all his own feed – all was disposed of. We have been given the various reasons for this; some of them stack up, some of them don't, but the important thing is what it says about the system. For us chefs what it brought home once again is the importance of that 'real' traceability, the kind that means you know exactly whose hands the food passed through.

Our aim today is simply to bring everyone together to look at this industry and ask whether it is possible to raise the bar. We believe it should be.

It may mean a little pain for everyone at first – ultimately it is a question of paying more, possibly a lot more, for our pork – and I know that's not a popular concept at the moment. But hopefully in the long-run it can mean a better return for farmers, a better product for chefs and a better life for pigs.

So let's take a serious look at how we treat and eat pigs – it involves all of us, all the way along the chain, we all have a responsibility and the power to make a change.

And then let us celebrate this wonderful animal, so long a part of our culinary tradition, by tasting excellent artisan produce during our break and this afternoon enjoying a Spit-roast organic pig, lovingly raised, butchered and cooked by Gold River Organic Farm, Ed Hick, Brooklodge.

MINISTER TREVOR SARGENT TD
Minister for Food and Horticulture
at the Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Food

Opening Remarks

- Speciality pig production has huge potential not just for Irish market but for export, particularly in demand in Germany
- Anxious that it not fall victim to trends, must be embarked on by committed and knowledgeable people
- Richard Moeran, organic pig farmer and forester – ideal setting for pigs and great image to sell; healthy and happy pigs
(NOTE FROM RH – This is true, but there is very little mixed broadleaf forestry that pigs need available in Ireland, and those planted under recent grant schemes will not be mature enough for many years to come).
- Competitive sector, Ireland only 1% of European output, large specialised production units and high productivity levels. But trend towards larger, fewer farms is not the way to go; need to think of food security, need more farmers, not more food miles.
- Speciality pig production is in its infancy in Ireland but has huge potential



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- If our market is Europe and particularly Germany, we need to make the decision to exclude GM.
- Germany has created a 'Ohne-GM' (GM-Free) label. They are setting a trend which we ignore at our peril.
- The German market wants organic pig meat from Ireland. When can I tell them they will get it?

Questions to the Minister

Q. Why were all the small local abattoirs closed down? This is a major obstacle for small scale pig production. There is too much red tape.

A: This is a commercial decision by the butchers, was no longer viable.

But small abattoirs do keep alive traditions. We are working on pilot project for mobile abattoirs and I will keep progressing this.

Q. Mary-Anne Bartlett, Compassion in World Farming Ireland

A complaint has been submitted to the EU against The Dept of Agriculture for not addressing the issue of routine tail docking and lack of provision of enrichment materials in Irish pig farming. Why has this been addressed?

A. Not aware of it. Not responsible for meat, but will raise the issue with the Minister and ensure that it is looked at.

HELEN BROWNING OBE

Organic Farmer & Policy Advisor for the Soil Association UK/

ON THE PIG'S BACK

Running a commercially viable outdoor/organic pig operation – rearing happy, healthy pigs – examining different systems and options for outdoor and indoor/outdoor pig production & strategies for wet climates

Ms. Browning tenant farms a 1,350 acre organic mixed farm in Wiltshire, which she took over in 1986 and gradually converted to organic. In the late eighties she established Eastbrook Organic Meats which sells to supermarkets and runs a home delivery business. She later established the 'The Flying Pig' outdoor catering venture and recently took over the running of the local village pub. Eastbrook Farm currently includes 220 British Saddleback sows and an average of 1800 pigs at any one time, which are fully integrated with the arable system. They finish between 3000 and 3500 pigs per year.

She is renowned as an industry leader and a substantial contributor to both the organic sector and the debate on the way forward for food and farming in the UK. In addition to being a Policy Advisor, and formerly Director of Food & Farming, for the Soil Association, she is chair of the England Animal Health And Welfare Implementation Group and the Food Ethics Council. Previously she was a member of Government Panel on Sustainable



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Development (UK), the Meat & Livestock Commission and the UK Government's Policy Commission on the Future of Food & Farming ('the Curry Commission')

Speech Notes

Advantages of Organic system: No farrowing crate or confinement, late weaning (min 6 weeks), no teeth cutting, tail docking, iron injections, castration or nose-ringing, no routine medication or growth promoters, Organic, GM-Free feed and benefits to the environment. If not organic, what to look out for: Whole tails, indoor and outdoor access, forage availability, almost no medication.

Ideally should not be done on a very big scale, especially in a very wet climate. Does require fairly free-draining soil. With the amounts of rainfall in Ireland and heavy ground, keeping large amounts of free ranging pigs can be difficult. Need to be moved very regularly.

However, many different systems can be looked at and even organic systems can be adapted to different climates, weather conditions. Organic standards allow indoor housing in severe weather conditions.

Barn-based indoor/outdoor systems and over-wintering indoors are possibilities.

Pig production should ideally be part of a mixed farm system. Clean-grazing, rotational system. Forage availability at all times.

Ideal by-products of cheese-making; whey is an excellent protein source. Pigs should be recyclers, waste-reducers.

QUOTE

"Large-scale outdoor pig-keeping may be tricky across much of Ireland, but there are still many opportunities to incorporate these delightful versatile and sometimes profitable animals into any sustainable farming system".

JOHN PAUL & TJ CROWE
Crowe's Farm, Dundrum, Co. Tipperary

THIS LITTLE PIGGY WENT TO MARKET

Setting up organic pig production – growth in outdoor pig farming and demand for slaughter and processing facilities – marketing free-range/organic pork – product demand – potential return for the farmer.

JOHN PAUL CROWE

28 year old John Paul Crowe is from Dundrum in Tipperary He has a passion for agriculture and the environment. After completing his leaving certificate at Doon CBS John Paul studied agriculture in Rockwell College, then received a Certificate of Safety and Health in UCD, followed by a Diploma in Safety and Health in University of Limerick and then achieved a Diploma in Speciality Food Production in UCC. All through his studies, John Paul has been farming the home farm and has now converted it to a fully certified organic farm. He farms a mixed farm of mainly beef and pigs and on a smaller scale crops and sheep. He believes a good mixture of enterprises is key to a vibrant organic farm.



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John Paul works in conjunction with his brothers TJ and Eamonn of Crowe's Farm Artisan Meats in the marketing of their range of products. John Paul has appeared on television and many newspaper articles mainly to do with his venture into organic pig production.

Speech notes

Setting Up in organic pig Production

Hello everyone my name is John Paul and I'm going to speak to you in connection with my experience thus far in organic pig production,

Firstly a bit of background- Currently we are farming 135 acres or so of which 80 is owned and 55 is leased. The land is mainly deep soil and best suited to grass production.

In September of 06 I decided to start my conversion of the farm to organics, previously to this the application of fertilizer and animal medicines was minuscule as I always had a focus on an organic chemical free way of farming.

In total it takes 2 years to convert a holding to organic, although in my case it took 2 years 3 months but this was purely because of paperwork and application dates, so it was December 08 when we officially became a certified organic holding.

Prior to organic conversion I would have mainly been producing beef. Having always liked and been interested in pigs I decided to look at the possibility of organically rearing pigs, this was fuelled by the fact that we had an abattoir and processing unit on our farm as it was. Things moved up a notch on discussing it with my brother TJ and the demand he was receiving from people for organic pork and bacon products. And so the leap of faith began!

I purchased 2 sows in Feb 07 and from there it started.

We now currently have 10 sows and five more gilts due to arrive in the next couple of weeks. It is hoped that by this time next year I will have in the region of 30 sows producing in the region of 10 to 15 pigs per week all organic and free range.

Prior to dipping my toe in Organic pig Production I researched quite a bit in to it. I found it difficult to acquire information within Ireland and most of the articles and case studies I read via the web came from the England Denmark the US and some Australia. I found on contacting some of the governing bodies in Ireland (which will remain nameless) on organic pig production there was an attitude of it won't work, not in Ireland, it had been tried before yet no information was available as to how it had been tried before and so on.

Fortunately I didn't let this dishearten me and I looked to our nearest neighbours in the UK to see if they were producing much in the way of organic pigs.

I was fortunate to get to speak with Helen Browning whom we just heard speak and she kindly gave me her time with great insight into organic pig production as well as a guided tour of their farm at Eastbrook upon a visit across the water.

I now was fuelled with information and the belief that organic pig production could work in Ireland!

Growth in Outdoor Pig Farming



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In my opinion over the past couple of years and especially since the pork crisis which we are all more than familiar with, the appetite for organic, free range pork reared in a natural as possible way to the pig without chemicals and restrictions to the pig in an enclosed environment.

The amount of times I've been asked by people to sell them a couple of weaners is amazing, If I did i definitely wouldn't have enough if any to finish for myself which I guess in itself represents a market.

Any older people I speak with often recall times gone by when they used to have a couple of pigs in a sty at the end of the garden or in the shed in the back yard that they used to recycle their swill and act as efficient composters. The fun really starts when their mouths start to water at the thoughts of the wonderful tasting pork, Black puddings, and home cured bacon they used to get from their back yard composter's.

The ritual of the killing of the pig will then always come up and the group effort that was involved, with vivid happy memories from people being recalled. In my opinion the biggest growth lies here in good tasting pork between people grouping together and rearing there couple of pigs like they used too. The biggest barrier I feel here is the red tape involved, immediately when people hear of having to apply for a herd number and an inspection from the department the interest begins to slowly evaporate.

However any farmers or enthusiasts with the ways and means that feel they would like to rear free range or organic pork should without doubt research and give it considered thought because I firmly believe the drive is back on for quality tasting pork and bacon by people, instead of the factory reared bland pork on today's market.

Potential Return For farmers

Having recently set up in organic pig production and as we are still in expansion it is hard to put the exact return to the farmer for organic pig production but what I can give is a guides to potential income and stats of a well run organic pig enterprise.

Key to success in organic pig farming an individual will need to have

GOOD ANIMAL HUSBANDRY SKILLS

A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF THE PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS

DECIDE THE TYPE OF PIGS THEY WISH TO BREED FROM BE IT TRADITIONAL OR SOME OF THE NEW GENOTYPES

USE OF THE PIGS WITHIN THE WHOLE FARM ROTATION

HAVE A MARKET FOR THE END PRODUCT

Currently the market price for a organic pig dead weight would be in the region of €4/kg basing an average pig at 70kg dead weight this will yield €280 per pig killed

If you average that a sow will have 1.85 litters per year and 9.5 Bonham's per litter this will give you 17.6 weaned pigs/sow/year



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Therefore one sow would give you a return of €4928 gross

Again doing rough calculations on my own farm it costs in the region of €180 per finished pig per year this figure includes feed/labour/straw costs

So the margin per finished pig is in the region of €100 or €1760 margin per sow per annum

Again these figures are based on current feed costs and market price for organic pig/meat a rise or fall in costs would have a positive or a negative effect on margin either way.

I'd like to thank you all for your attention, and I would welcome any enquiries anyone may have in relation to organic pig production later or in the future, I will now hand you over to my brother TJ who will speak to you further on the market

TJ CROWE

Tj Crowe is a second generation pork butcher at Crowe's Farm in Dundrum Co. Tipperary and runs the processing end of the enterprise. He has 13 years experience in the day to day running of his abattoir and processing and a lifetime of growing up beside one. Along with being a producer he is also a very keen consumer of delicious pork treats.

Speech Notes

Demand for slaughter and processing facilities

My name is TJ Crowe and I run the slaughtering and processing side of Crowe's Farm, a business I inherited from my father, who stopped rearing pigs in 1981 and began slaughtering the same year. I was five at the time and remember my father asking me if I would give a hand killing the pigs, I think my career path from that day on was sealed, so here I am almost 30 years later still operating the same small abattoir.

Coincidentally Ed's Father supplied the equipment to my dad for the abattoir. It was a small community back then and an even smaller one now.

We are a bit of a rare breed in the pork industry in so far as we are one of the few small abattoirs and processors left in the country. We have kept on our core business of slaughtering and processing with the encouragement of our local authority vets and plenty of hard work. In the past few years we have had many family discussions as to whether we would continue slaughtering or go the way of so many small abattoirs. I remember my vet saying to me that because everyone was going one way maybe I should go the other, when I told him we were thinking of getting out of slaughtering. We were at a crossroads should we try to compete with the mass market brands or find our own uniqueness and try to develop that. I'm glad we stayed on doing what we were doing, because I now feel there is a future in our little corner of the market whereas a few years ago I felt we were being crushed by a constant stream of legislation saying mostly what we can't do anymore, like using the blood for puddings.



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Over the past 3 or 4 years I have seen a much greater demand for slaughter and processing facilities on a countrywide basis, we now slaughter and process for people from as far away as Galway, Wicklow and Kerry.

Increase in farmers markets has given niche farmers a quick route to market for their products.

There are a lot more people keeping pigs as a result of shows by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Jamie Oliver.

With the shortage of small abattoirs catering for small producers it is creating the problem of animals being transported over long distances to slaughter which causes stress which is one of the biggest factors to poor quality pork.

Failure of centralized abattoirs

I think last year's dioxin scare would not have been so severe had there been more abattoirs supplying the market instead of 3 or 4 huge abattoirs killing about 90% of the Irish pig population. This is why there had to be a knee jerk total withdrawal of all pork products, whereas if we had a lot of small scale abattoirs killing pigs from the locality it would have been easier to contain the contaminated meat products.

The one size fits all approach to risk assessment on behalf of the governing bodies needs to be looked at, why should an abattoir killing 20 to 30 pigs a week be classed into the same category as one killing 50000.

I'm not saying that they shouldn't have the same approach to food safety but new entrants to the market should be encouraged and guided by the regulatory bodies, you need to crawl before you can walk.

I'd love to see a few new small abattoirs opening around the country to cater for all the aspiring new farmers/ food producers to direct market their unique products. At the moment I am at capacity for slaughtering and processing for people wanting to sell their products directly. I am reluctant to expand because then I might lose essentially what I am a small pork butcher

Marketing free-range/organic pork and product demand

As some of you know and for those that don't, we produce a range of dry cure bacon and sausage products and recently have started to develop a range of organic pork products from our own organic pigs, so we have come full circle, rearing, slaughtering and processing.

The Public appetite for free range/organic pork is increasing, organic food sales have achieved an impressive 11% year on year growth. It is confirmed that the organic market is now worth €120m. The Irish organic retail market was estimated to be worth €104 million in 2008 compared with €66 million in 2006 and €38 million in 2003. This trend clearly illustrates that organic food, much to critic's surprise, is rejecting standard retail recessionary patterns.

The fresh produce market is now worth €48m alone. It has witness an explosive, year on year growth of 31.9%.

Consumers today are increasingly aware of what to look for in quality pork products, it being driven by chefs and TV programmes and animal welfare issues. I remember a good



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friend of mine asking me in school what black pudding was made from and being surprised when I told him its main ingredient was blood.

Consumer's tastes have changed, now they see the worth in paying a little extra for a high pork content sausage or a rasher that doesn't disappear when put it into a pan. When I first started making sausages and preaching of what I thought were the merits of a good sausage nearly everyone said that they never considered that there was anything other than pork and spices in their sausage. Now I'm hearing that they are shocked as to how little meat that some sausages contain and what are all the ingredients whose name I can hardly pronounce.

This makes marketing our products that bit easier, because they will preach to someone else and maybe we can start to have a diverse pork industry to be proud of.

From our point of view I think direct marketing is an essential route to getting our products out there, with courier services and the internet I can get my product anywhere in Ireland within 24hrs. Having a direct contact with the end consumer also helps with product feedback.

PIGGY IN THE MIDDLE

Forum breaks for tastings of Artisan Pork Products from a variety of producers including: Caherabeg Free range Pork; Crowe's Farm, Connemara Fine Foods/James McGeough, Curragh Chase Free Range Pork, Gubbeen Smokehouse, J. Hick & Sons, The Whole Hogs/M&K Meats, Umera Smoked Products.

ED HICK

Fourth generation pork butcher, J.Hick & Sons, Dun Laoghaire

EVERYTHING BUT THE SQUEAL

Snout-to-tail approach to how we process and eat pigs – The challenge of imports – Regulatory and practical barriers – Loss of traditional skills, educational deficit and attitudes

Ed Hick is a fourth generation pork butcher in the still family-run J. Hick & Sons in Dun Laoghaire. He has been involved in the business since about the age of 5 – or “since he was old enough to stand on an upturned bucket unattended”. Ed describes himself as a micro-producer, turning out speciality pork products using ‘slow’ artisan methods. Ed is also a market stallholder and has been trading in the Temple Bar Market since its inception ten years ago. He is also on the steering committee of the Irish Food Market Trader's Association and was actively involved in the campaign to maintain market rights



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in towns throughout Ireland. He has been an active member of Slowfood since 1998 and is also a member of the Associated Craft Butchers of Ireland

Loss of Traditional skills, the Educational Deficit, Attitudinal Changes

I'm a Pork Butcher, that is it and that is all! I learnt what I know through working in the family trade from about the age of 4 up. It is a trade handed down since the 1870's-1880's in our family, but realistically, would have had its dawns in prehistory. Pretty much as soon as we could stand on an upturned bucket we were linking sausages.... Exactly how much help we were at that stage is a moot point, and I'm sure my parents Jack & Betty sitting over there..... will have their own take on that! Please feel free to ask them. I might just take a second to ask them not to heckle!

I grew up handling pigs from killing them at the start of each week to cutting, curing, smoking, making sausages, making traditional puddings and wholesaling or retailing by the weekend.

When killing, we left out only the hair, the toenails and the gut contents for collection by our "boneman", and sometimes lobstermen from Coliemore or Bulloch took some of that even to bait their pots. Hair at that time was still being used for paint and shaving brushes, and sought after. Pig and badger bristles were the only available animal hair that did not mat together when wet... while badger gives a softer brush, it was always more expensive, and fell from favour following some anthrax experiment or other during WW2. so there was always a demand for any hair. Indeed Varian, the brush manufacturers still use a pig as their logo on their brushes. Toenails, they went for glue!

We kept and used the heads, the jowels, the leaf lards, the plucks, the hearts, the livers, the skirts, the kidneys, the maws, the melts, the caul, the mudgeons, the chitterlings, the rinds, the runners... they were all cleaned thoroughly, each in their own way, and prepared for use in Sausage, puddings or cured in salt, each for their own purpose, ...we even kept our gall bladders and the bile, although as detergent, not as food. This was mixed with warm water at day's end and the resulting froth was used to keep the drains clear.... More of this anon.

Traditionally the weight of offal to carcass would have been about 28lbs from a 140lbs pig! This edible offal represented just 20% of the animal, you can see why this might be important, particularly at a time when we were happy to ascribe some value to our animals.... Maybe we can find some use for all of this good food again?

Much of this offal is today being researched into by Teagasc and others, as "nutracueticals" and "bio-actives", this is a process of isolating the enzymes, amino acids etc extracting them, sterilising them and then adding them back into food! ... All of this is to add "functionality" to our food, which interestingly enough, your granny would have known about, although I doubt very much that she had a working knowledge of "bio-availability" she probably just had liver on the rolling menu in the house!



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My own experience of using the gall bladders is a perfect example of this. We used to use a naturally occurring enzyme (bile) added to hand hot water, which is to say body temperature to re-activate the enzymes, and wash this down our drains at the end of the day.... The function of the gall bladder and bile within our bodies is the breakdown of fat! Warming it up to body temp most likely acted as a trigger, you didn't need to know all of the reasons why things were done..... just that this was the correct way to do them!

In my working lifetime there were also Beef Butchers, Poulterers, Bacon Hands, Slaughtermen and Porters, Tanners, and Skin Merchants..... All of these people had trades that took from 5-7 years to learn out. Some of this knowledge spilled over into other trades, some of it was kept like alchemists secrets and jealously guarded against interlopers, all of it was 100% useful, keeping trades alive and crucially maximising the value of each animal killed. The knowledge overlap between trades was something that far from poaching into each other's territory, actually accorded each other the respect due....

Put simply, "if you had spent 7yrs learning your stuff, what would make you think you could pick up my trade from a conversation or two?!?!?"

This knowledge and skill base by and large has gone, and we can only reference most of it today by reading about it! And although it is never too late to recover some of this knowledge, it is very late in our case!

Specialisation

Specialisation has been misunderstood by regulatory bodies, and whole swathes of traditional trades have been swept away, in a "We know best approach" This formed the mainstay of the headlong rush to centralise and standardize, in the mistaken belief that science can solve it all....

In today's meat trade we have "pass through" ovens openable on one side at a time instead of common sense, we have blast chillers to reduce core temps within 2 hrs instead of cooling racks where joints rested , we have super high pressure treatment of cooked meats that give us an incredible 120 days shelf life instead of nice fresh stuff you just had to use within a few days!!! We have to ask in whose interests these developments are?

We are paying a high price for this , as we have little bio-diversity and even less gastro-diversity on offer to us on localised basis here in developed countries. Pig breeds in particular, but not solely...

Although not terribly modern, The Pigs And Bacon Act 1935 has had no small part to play in this.... When bacon factories within the country had political affiliations, it was signed into law that only registered bacon factories could cure. My grandfather, a repeat offender, paid a hefty personal price for insisting on carrying on his trade, and eventually a derogation for pork butchers followed which allowed us to cure up to, but no more than



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25% of our weekly throughput. This law is still in force, but thankfully sidelined for the piece of drivel that it was.

Science can often explain how things happen in the world, that does not however mean it is the only discipline that can. Once Again, your granny knew a lot! And this means that science alone should not dictate terms. I'm sure there are many experts that have come into your kitchens and tell you how it should be done, without having ever had to work a kitchen.

Specialisation WAS the poulterer, the pork butcher, the fishmonger etc... the traceability so yearned for nowadays was not an issue, as most foods on sale were local and could be traced down the road to Fred the boatman, or Paddy the sheep farmer, Mary that kept chickens etc etc.. what we have nowadays is science's best efforts at retro fitting puncture repairs, having scattered the road with nails! There is research underway currently to barcode chickens beaks and feet,... this is an effort to retake some control of a behemoth that has become egg production...all we are short is a small tail mounted printers to label each egg as it comes out.....

hhhhhmmmmmthe Hens Ass Critical Control Pope's nose printer... HACCP yeah I think that sounds catchy!!!

What we see today as specialisation, is a separate chilled display counter for all of the blue plastic crates of fish, or the red crates of beef.... All of course, with their own "special" colour coded cutting boards you understand.

Production has become so specialised that only the smallest numbers of people at any given plant actually know what the ingredients of a product are. And few of these in the know are hands on.

All variability has been sacrificed on the altar of repeatability.

We have no specialisation today, just standardisation!

The challenge of Imports:

Imports are here to stay. As long as we intend to export our produce, we will have to contend with imports as part of international trade agreements. And let's face it Ireland has a bee in its export bonnet! We just love exporting!

For my part, I am more than happy to buy Irish farmhouse cheeses, but I never intend giving up wine or chocolate!

So what do we do? Well, we can always look at import substitution....

As a business activity this simply must be accorded the same exalted status as exporting by the powers that be, for it is at LEAST as valuable in monetary terms, and MORE valuable in terms of sustainability and localisation.!



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If we look at our balance of trade in any of the food sectors we should see areas that we can substitute imports with our own produce. Whether that is speciality cheeses or cured meats, we should be encouraging our own. And this is an area where Eurotoques have been showing the lead. Leading by example is fine and laudable; changing widely held opinions and attitudes is altogether different.

We must convince ourselves to buy our own! We must engender the little bit of pride or the little bit of confidence that makes the difference

And while I am not sure which approach to this would yield the best results, any approach would yield a better result than we are currently getting.

It's not that Argentina can't field a good soccer team, or rear good cattle, but if we were watching an international football match, I'm certain that most Irish people would be wearing green and not blue and white stripes! They might care a little too much about That particular type of PIGS BLADDER...!?!?! It would be really nice to export more value added produce though, rather than the cheapest commodities.

Regulatory + Practical Barriers

The single biggest practical barrier to my trade today is access to local supplies of pigs, and access to local killing facilities. In the 80's and 90's (that is the 1980's- and not the 1880's) we had our own little abattoir killing 15-20 pigs per week, most of them bought locally from within a 10 mile radius. All of the pigs were sold locally.

On a risk based approach, this model offers the best protection to the health of the nation, the best protection for the industry and indeed our overall food security as a country. One shortfall such as last Dioxin sorry I meant last December, however bad would only have stayed within the one parish... Local access to rearing and killing is very important, and cannot be overstressed.. unlike some of our poor piggies these days!

In our own case, first off our "pigmen" were legislated out by this absurd regulation to feed only dry mix to pigs.. and we all know where that led! Diesel powered dryers don't you know?

Second off my brother and I often had 4 vets inspect us per day.... Just how big of a threat were we ? Or were they maybe hanging around to see what they might learn? Either way what came to pass was shameful, unnecessary and avoidable.

The term "current thinking" always amuses me here, it is officialdom's way of saying "Do it my way....until I change my mind"



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MASSIMO SPIGAROLI

**Chef, Rare-breed pig farmer, Artisan Producer
Antica Corte Pallavicina, Parma, Italy**

THE PIGS OF MY DREAMS

How Massimo reviewed the local black pig breed – why the old breeds offer better quality and flavour – what pigs and skills can produce – the true value of a pig

Massimo Spigaroli is the owner, with his brother Luciano, of the Antica Corte Pallavicina near Parma in Italy and their family restaurant Al Cavallino Bianco nearby. Massimo is first and foremost a chef, but is now also a hotelier, farmer and artisan food producer, as well as having many official roles.

Massimo had made a name of himself as a chef by the age of 16 and at 22 he was already teaching at a School of Hotel Management. Much of the produce in his restaurant comes from their own land where Massimo farms his large herd of free ranging pigs, along with geese, cattle, vegetables and crops. From his old breed pigs Massimo produces a large range of renowned cured products, including *Culatello*, which is thought of as the most prized of all *salumi*, or cured meats. 15 years ago the 15th century palace of Pallavicino, which had been tenant farmed by his grandfather in the early 1900s, went on the market and Massimo and Luciano gathered all the money they could find to buy it. They have recently renovated it to its former glory and opened it as a small hotel and 'agri-turismo'.

Over 10 years of Massimo's life were spent dedicated to finding and reviving the native black pig of his region and re-launching the *Culatello di Zibello* cured pork product which had been made by his forefathers. These two things are probably the most remarkable of his many successes and indeed he has become known as a world authority on rare breed pigs and curing. In fact, Prince Charles has entrusted his own Large Black and Tamworth pigs to Massimo's care, to help him develop cured meat products from these.

Massimo is president of the consortium of *Culatello di Zibello* producers and of Euro-toques Italy.

Speech Notes

Accompanied by an beautiful, and sometimes amusing slideshow of photos from his farm in the Parma region of Italy, Massimo explained through an interpreter the fascinating story of how he spent over 10 years searching for the Black Pig breed of his region that he remembered from his youth and which his father and grandfather told stories of. Having travelled throughout Southern Europe he eventually found it close to him and convinced an old farmers to sell him 3 of its precious pigs. He has now revived the breed and built up his own large herd.

He compares these native breeds to the white breeds, which have become common in commercial production. His pigs produce red meat, which has good marbling and a good layer of fat. They are very slow growing and are killed late – but the flavour is outstanding and perfect for his exclusive traditional breed charcuterie products.

Despite the extreme weather in his region, very cold winters and damp misty weather from the Po river which their farm borders, the pigs thrive ranging in a large area of open fields



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and forest, with corn left fallow for them to feed freely on. For the coldest weeks of the winter, they spent some time in large sheds.

Questioned from the audience about feed and use of GM, Massimo said that although not technically illegal in Italy, GM was not accepted and that they did not allow any GM inputs in their production. He said there was no problem sourcing GM soya and maize.

OPEN FORUM

Comments, questions & discussion from the Forum delegates

A large number of producers were presented and directed many technical questions relating to outdoor/organic production to Helen Browning, John Paul Crowe and Massimo Spigaroli.

TJ Crowe and Ed Hick were asked whether it is legal to use fresh pigs blood for pudding and whether other offal can be used.

Many people are under the impression that fresh pigs blood cannot be used. In fact it is not illegal, but in practice it has become very difficult (and strongly discouraged) to collect it for pudding production.

Jane Russell in Kildare is now producing fresh blood black pudding and TJ Crowe is supplying fresh blood to a pudding producer in his area also.

A similar situation applies in terms of use of offal. It has been made very difficult to use it and most of it is classified as waste product.

The main issues raised in discussion were:

Availability of suitable feed at reasonable prices (organic, GM-Free etc), availability of slaughtering and processing facilities, red tape/over-regulation.

Ronan Byrne, The Friendly Farm, Athenry, Co. Galway proposed the setting up of a loose network for outdoor pig producers.

Ruth Hegarty of Euro-toques made closing comments to bring the forum to conclusion and sum up what might be achieved from the discussion:

She commended the proposal to set up a Producer group and committed to taking action to make this happen. She said that small scale producers needed to work together to tackle the major obstacles to their industry; which seemed to be appropriate feed availability, access to slaughtering and processing facilities, and routes to market.

She said that the butchers had a huge part to play in this and should be brought into the discussion. She said butchers need to be pro-active if they wanted to survive in the current climate and that without them this kind of small-scale meat production could not get off the ground. She suggested that the Craft Butchers (ACBI), who were represented and the forum might consider if they could provide processing facilities for such producers.



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She said lack of knowledge and the attitude of the authorities was another major barrier. It was very clear that this kind of farming was not taken seriously by the relevant agencies and departments. When Euro-toques contacted Teagasc Pig Division during their research they were told that outdoor pig production in Ireland was “just not possible” and when they asked for data on Teagasc research into outdoor pig production they were told “you’d have to ask the organic crowd for that, we wouldn’t have anything on it”. Producers were conducting their own research, without any support from the authorities.

She said that producers needed to come together and fight for recognition and support for outdoor pig production as a serious farm enterprise with real potential.

Ruth also pointed out that some large-scale commercial indoor producers were present at the forum. She said much of what was discussed probably seemed irrelevant to them, but that the event was also aimed at them. Euro-toques wanted to examine whether a ‘middle ground’ production was possible; where on a large commercial scale farmers could take steps to improve animal welfare, feed etc. Would this result in better flavour which is ultimately what the chefs are looking for? Euro-toques hoped to follow up on this with some commercial farmers who had shown a lot of interest in what Euro-toques had to say.

RESULTS/FOLLOW-UP

Controversy ensued following an article published in the Irish Independent the day after the event Monday 7/09/09 which picked up on the Euro-toques survey of its member chefs which revealed that 88% of them were not happy with the quality of pork generally available in Ireland. The article gave the impression that Euro-toques chefs source pork from abroad rather than use Irish pork (whereas in actual fact many said they avoid putting pork on the menu altogether). This goes against what Euro-toques is all about (local, quality sourcing) and missed the point what Euro-toques wanted was to raise the bar in Irish production and pay more, so that we can source good quality Irish pork.

This was also picked up on my some international pig industry websites.

Angry pig farmers contacted the Wineport Lodge (workplace of our Commissioner-General Feargal O’Donnell), Euro-toques and Bord Bia (due to their involvement as a sponsor).

The eventual upshot of all this was that we met with Bord Bia again (having consulted with both them and the IFA in the research stage for the forum) to look at how the whole thing could be progressed. The decision was made to run a pilot scheme with a commercial farmer to raise some pigs to our ‘middle ground’ spec.

This has been progressed. A farmer (who we had already met with and visited in advance of the forum) is going to carry out this pilot and a meeting will take place in the next week or two (hopefully with the cooperation of Bord Bia and Teagasc) to outline the spec and timeline.

The hope is that within about 6-8 months we will have a batch up pigs grown under this middle ground system which Euro-toques chefs will take and taste test – and hopefully sell in their restaurants.



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The proposed spec is likely to address: Feed (GM-Free, high quality, and varied), outdoor access, rooting/foraging material access, breed type.

The Outdoor Pig Producers Group is also getting underway. An initial contact email will be sent out to all the producers on our list to inform of a meeting held 04/11/09.

We hope to obtain from the Department a full list of farmers with herd numbers for pigs, and possibly results of a recent survey of these.

We will initially set up a loose network to put small scale pig producers in contact with each other.

We also plan to design a comprehensive questionnaire to build a picture of what is out there and what people are doing in terms of: herd sizes, breeds, feed, slaughtering and processing, sales and marketing etc

We hope this information will assist in lobbying for support and recognition of this industry.

Other than this the central aims of the network will be to address the following issues:

Feed, Stock sourcing and pig sales, breeding, slaughter, processing, routes to market, regulation/legislation.