

# Organic Knowledge Update

## Pigs

February 2011

## Organic pig sector in the Netherlands



The Dutch organic pig sector has shown strong growth in recent years. Although a significant share of organic pork is exported, domestic consumers are continuing to buy more organic pork. To facilitate organic pig farmers, Wageningen UR and Louis Bolk Institute carry out a variety of research aimed specifically at the sector.

### Dutch organic pig sector

Early 2009 there were about 87 organic pig farms in the Netherlands. The country has a waiting list for conventional pig farmers wanting to convert to organic production.

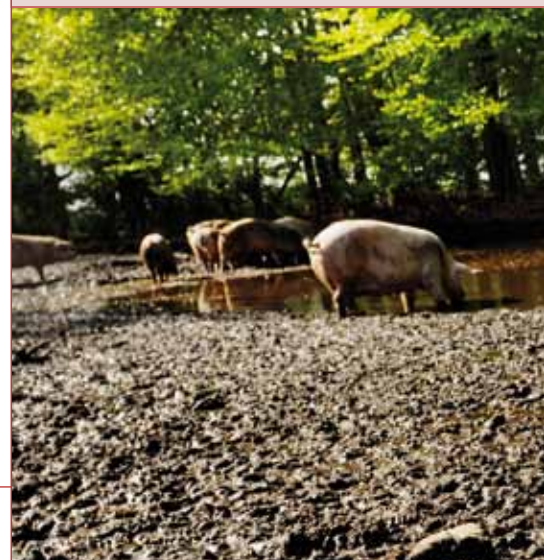
Gross sales for organic pig meat in the Netherlands grew by 4.4% in 2009. Organic pig meat has become part of the regular assortment in supermarkets and at the largest chain of butcheries in the country. The share of organic meat in gross pig meat sales

## → Aspirations

By 2013 the Dutch organic pig sector aims to be at the forefront of sustainable agricultural production, while at the same time providing a consistent economic benefit to all links in the production chain. The sector wants to safeguard animal welfare and at the same time provide high quality meat products.

The organic pig sector focuses on:

- a strong position on North-West European and regional markets;
- focus on high quality pork;
- realistic cost prices at farm level;
- using feed from sustainable sources and re-using waste from the food industry etc.;
- no more castrating, healthy piglets and natural housing systems;
- a 20% drop in feed costs through higher efficiency and different methods;
- a 50% drop in use of fossil fuels;
- 100% organic inputs;
- additional rules for the transport of animals;
- minimal use of medication;
- reducing emissions from the stables.



is higher than anywhere else in Europe. This is partly due to the strong chain that was built in the past few years. A discerning brand called BioVarken (EcoPig) was developed by the sector.

## Current affairs

Animal welfare remains an issue close to the heart of consumers. In the Netherlands, the Society for the Protection of Animals has started a label for meat products, that indicates animal welfare. Organic pig meat has the highest ranking in this system, but other non-conventional types of pig husbandry also do well. This label may impact the market for organic pig meat, in a positive or negative way.

Using non-castrated boars has become quite common in the conventional Dutch pig industry, mainly as a result of social pressure and education by animal welfare groups. The Dutch market for boar meat is now saturated, however. Other European consumers are unwilling to move to boar



meat, because of fears of boar-taint. This has proven a challenge for organic boar meat, as parts of all Dutch organic pigs are exported. A new organic boar meat project will be started in 2011.

Managing the carbon footprint of pig farms and reducing nitrogen emissions are other important topics.



## Research projects

- **Young grass silage** This project looks at the composition, digestibility and protein content of wet silage for finishing pigs. How much silage is eaten and what is the influence of this type of feed on the technical results?  
*Contact: Dr Carola van der Peet, Carola.vanderPeet@wur.nl*
- **Natural health in pigs** This project looks at natural products to improve animal health. These products come from plants, yeast or algae, for instance.  
*Contact: Dr Maria Groot, Maria.Groot@wur.nl*
- **Reduction of Ascaris infections in organic pigs** How can intestinal roundworms (Ascaris especially) be prevented and reduced? Management measures and preventive use of herbs in feed may contribute. This project aims to develop a treatment and prevention plan and monitor the results.  
*Contact: Monique Mul MSc, Monique.Mul@wur.nl*
- **Silages versus compound diets in gestating sows** Feeding costs are high and rising. Silages may prove a cheaper option for feeding gestating sows and might be able to replace up to 70% of compound diets. The digestibility and nutritional value of silages is looked into, as is the uptake of silages by the sows. What are the effects on feeding costs and reproductive performance?  
*Contact: Dr Carola van der Peet, Carola.vanderPeet@wur.nl*
- **Husbandry of organic male pigs** Boar taint and so-called 'negative behaviour' (sexual and aggressive behaviour) are serious barriers for finishing organic boars. This project aims to find ways to reduce these effects of non-castration.  
*Contact: Herman Vermeer MSc, Herman.Vermeer@wur.nl*
- **Improving welfare performance in organic husbandry systems** This project aims to improve the welfare performance in organic husbandry systems by stimulating measures in on-farm situations. Improvement measures often demand an integrated approach.  
*Contact: Ingrid van Dixhoorn DVM, Ingrid.vanDixhoorn@wur.nl*
- **Environmental enrichment for organic pigs** Outdoor areas in pens for organic pigs in the Netherlands are often rectangular and bare. This project aims to improve animal welfare and public image by offering animals environmental enrichment in the outdoor area.  
*Contact: Dr Marc Bracke, Marc.Bracke@wur.nl*
- **Piglet health: rearing conditions and breeding** The mortality of both new-born and weaned organic piglets is relatively high. This project aims to improve maternal behaviour, housing conditions and looks at breeding options. Can we breed a more robust pig with lower mortality rates in piglets?  
*Contact: Herman Vermeer MSc, Herman.Vermeer@wur.nl*





## Literature

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Bioconnect aims to further develop and strengthen the Dutch organic sector by initiating and implementing research projects. Within Bioconnect organic entrepreneurs (from farmers to shop-keepers) work together with research institutes, colleges and universities and consultancy organisations. This leads to demand-driven research that is unique to the Netherlands.



The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation sponsors these research projects.



Ministry of Economic Affairs,  
Agriculture and Innovation

Wageningen UR (University & Research centre) and the Louis Bolk Institute together carry out these research projects. About 140 projects dedicated to organic agriculture are currently under way.



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