

PIGS

November 2023

Edited by Amy Quinn



Welcome to the November edition of our monthly newsletter.

The past number of weeks has seen pig price drop seven times in a mere 10 weeks with all those involved in the sector now hoping that it has bottomed out and the current price can be sustained going into the end of this year.

The Teagasc “Outlook 2024 - Economic Prospects for Agriculture” conference took place on November 28th where economic overviews and outlooks for the various agricultural sectors were presented by a number of leading Teagasc experts, with Michael McKeon, Specialised Pig Adviser, with the Teagasc Pig Development Department (PDD) representing the pig sector, reviewing 2023 and forecasting 2024.

The Irish pig sector was loss-making in early 2023 but returned to good profitability for the remainder of the year. The outlook for 2024 is for modest profitability, with margins improving as

the year progresses to peak in mid-year, with a marginal reduction in the second half of the year.

In this edition of the newsletter Michael gives a summary of his talk from the event and also joins me on the latest podcast episode of “The Pig Edge for some further insight ([Listen here!](#))

Finally, we are delighted to note that the Level 6 Farm Technician Apprenticeship will be commencing in December with many pig farms and students registered to start. If for some reason you didn’t get the opportunity to register for this course but are interested in enrolling please contact me as soon as possible.

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- An economic overview of the Irish pig sector for 2023 & outlook for 2024
- Getting weaned pigs drinking water earlier

An economic overview of the Irish pig sector for 2023 & outlook for 2024

Michael McKeon



Economic overview of 2023

- Composite feed price per tonne entered 2023 on a historic high level (€480/tonne) arising from the feed ingredient prices increasing rapidly with the outbreak of the Ukrainian war.
- The 2023 annual average feed cost is estimated to be 155 cent per kg dwt. This is virtually unchanged from the 2022 (156 cent) but higher than the 5 year average (129 cent).
- At 224 cent per kg, the 2023 Irish pig price was significantly higher than the 2022 average (182 cent per kg), primarily attributable to the input cost inflation following the outbreak of the Ukrainian war and a tightening of EU pig supply.
- The estimated 2023 average pig price of 224 cent per kg is significantly higher than the five year average (2019-2023) of 181 cent per kg.
- The 2023 'Margin Over Feed' (MOF) per kg is estimated to be 69 cent per kg dwt. This is significantly higher (+46%) than the 26 cent in 2022, which was the lowest in 40 years.
- The volume of Irish pigs slaughtered decreased to 3.48m in 2023, which was a decrease of 360,000 pigs (-9.3%) on the 2022 level and similar to the 2014 level. In 2023, of the 3.84m pigs of ROI origin that were slaughtered,

0.353m were slaughtered in Northern Ireland, a decline of 41,000 pigs on the 2022 level.

- In 2023, pig slaughter volumes in the main European pig producing countries decreased by 8% compared to 2022. The countries with the largest decrease were Denmark (-19%) Germany (-6%), Spain (-6%), France (-5%).
- The 2023 exports (Jan-Sept.) of Irish pigmeat declined by 17% when compared to 2022. The largest destination decline was China which decreased in export volume by 7%. The EU pigmeat exports to China also declined in volume terms in 2023 when compared to 2022 (690,000 versus 788,000 tonnes)

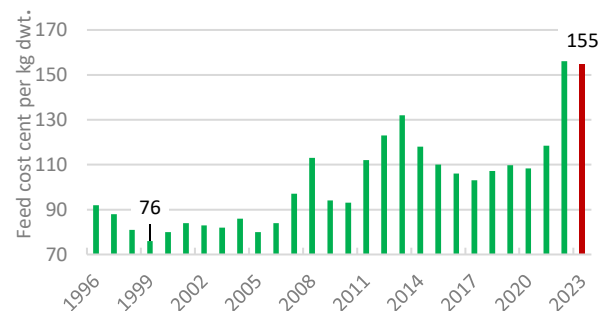


Figure 1: Irish Compound Pig Feed Price 2013 to 2023.
Estimate for 2023

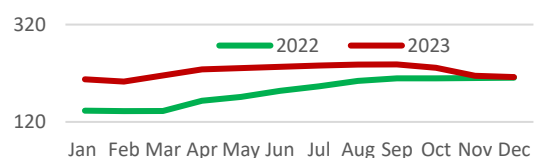


Figure 2: Monthly Irish Pig Prices 2022 – 2023. Estimate for 2023

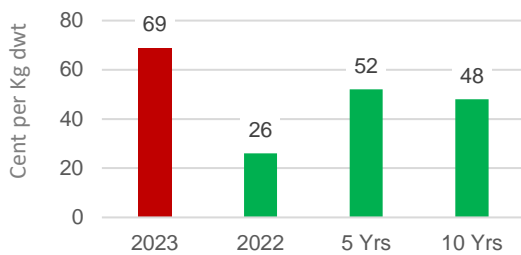


Figure 3: Margin Over Feed: Historical Comparison with 2023. Estimate for 2023

Economic outlook for 2024

- The November 2023 composite pig feed price of €399 per tonne will be maintained into early 2024.
- In Q2 and Q3 of 2024, pig feed costs are forecast to marginally decrease, with expectations of good harvest yields in the northern hemisphere and further transition to contract milling / forward buying.
- Forecasts for the 2024 South American (SA) soyabean harvest suggest it will reach 163 mt. however current drought conditions in some parts of Brazil may lead to a lower forecast.
- The annualised composite pig feed price is forecast to decrease by 10 percent in 2024 relative to 2023. This represents a decrease to 139 cent per kg in 2024 when compared to 155 cent per kg in 2023.
- In 2023 the size of the EU sow herd is likely to continue to stabilise in the main pig producing countries, with the exception of Spain. The Spanish sow herd is expected to continue its long term growth, albeit at a lower level than previously (+1%).
- In 2024, the size of the Irish sow herd is expected to stabilise / marginally increase after a significant reduction in 2022-2023, but the tight supply volume of Irish pigs is expected to continue.

- The volume of exports of pigmeat from the EU to China will have an important influence on the EU & Irish pig price in 2024. It is expected that China's import requirements from the EU will remain weak due to their continued sow herd culling.
- African Swine Fever (ASF) will continue to feature in 2024 with further cases in Eastern Europe and western Europe countries continuing heightened biosecurity precautions.
- In 2024, the Irish pig price is forecast to be 200 cent per kg, but this forecast is highly influenced by ASF developments, EU pig supply volumes and Chinese import demand.
- Following high losses in 2021-2022 and a return to profitability in 2023, the Irish pig sector is expected to continue to deliver moderate levels of profitability in 2024.

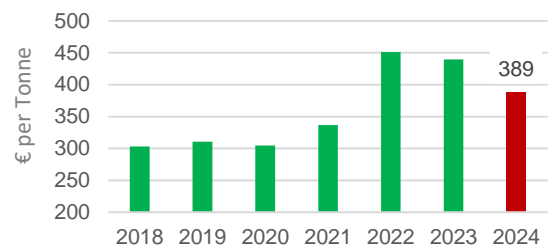


Figure 4: Historical Compound Pig Feed Price and forecast for 2024. Estimate for 2023 & forecast for 2024

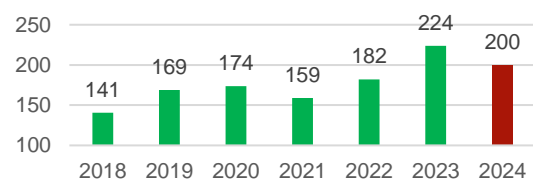


Figure 5: Historical Irish pig prices and forecast for 2024. Estimate for 2023 & forecast for 2024

This overview was recently presented at the Teagasc Outlook 2024 conference. The detailed event booklet can be found at; <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2023/Outlook-2024.pdf>

Getting weaned pigs drinking water earlier

Peadar Lawlor

We all know that weaned pigs suffer a growth setback in the first week after weaning. Just before weaning piglets can be growing at 400g per day. This can drop to less than 100g per day in the first week post-weaning. This happens because feed intake in newly weaned pigs is very low and variable. In-fact it can be 24 hours or more before some pigs start eating solid starter diet at all.

Providing a nutrient dense, highly palatable starter diet at weaning will help in this transition period. However, it is very hard to expect pigs to eat solid feed if they are not drinking sufficient volumes of water at this time. It may surprise some to know that it can take weaned pigs more than 7 days before they consuming the equivalent volume of fluids that they were right before weaning.

Something as simple as providing supplementary water in a cube or turkey drinker can be of immense benefit in promoting water intake early post-weaning. Providing this supplementary water is particularly beneficial during the first 72 hour after weaning. It may help in a number of ways:

- It's visible and accessible, so the pigs will drink.
- When pigs drink they will explore solid food.
- Pigs will not become dehydrated which would depress their feed intake further.
- It will give pigs a chance to explore their new pen and become familiar with the watering system.

These factors can contribute to reducing post-weaning mortality, increasing feed intake and thus

increasing post-weaning growth rate. Twenty years ago the practice of providing supplementary water to pigs for a few days after weaning was commonplace on Irish pig units. Units should consider re-introducing the practice.

Below are some other pointers to increase early post-weaning water intake;

- Use the same drinker type in the weaner accommodation as in the farrowing rooms so that pigs are familiar with where to get water. Ideally, these drinkers should be bowls.
- Ensure that water flow rates, drinker height, angle and position are not restricting water intake of your pigs.
- Ensure that the water supplied is of good microbial and mineral quality.

Speaking recently to some Danish farmers, they provide electrolytes in a supplementary drinker for the first 2-3 days after weaning. This drinker is gradually moved closer to the feeder to encourage increased feed intake. They were convinced that this strategy results in earlier feed exploration and higher post-weaning feed intakes. It may be a practice worthwhile trying here.

Weaning is the most challenging event that a pig will experience in its lifetime resulting in a major growth check. The only way to counter this is to encourage earlier exploration of feed and increased post-weaning feed intake. However, to achieve this your pigs must drink. Remember 'if they don't drink they won't eat'

James Cullen awarded the Edgar Pye Research Scholarship

Earlier this year James Cullen (SETU and Teagasc) was awarded an Edgar Pye Research Scholarship by the Society of Feed Technologists. This prestigious Scholarship provided James with the necessary finance to conduct additional research on the sanitisation of liquid feeding systems. He was one of only three successful applicants awarded the 2023 Scholarship. On November 9th last, James presented a paper based on his work titled 'Investigating the impact of sanitisation of the feeding system on the bacterial and fungal microbiota of liquid feed and liquid feeding systems for pigs' at the Society of Feed Technologists and Pig Veterinary Society joint pig conference in Birmingham. James' PhD is supervised by Professor Gillian Gardiner from the Eco-Innovation Research Centre, SETU Waterford, Dr. Peadar Lawlor from the PDD in Teagasc Moorepark, and Dr. Paul Cormican from the Animal Bioscience Research Centre in Teagasc Grange.



Welcome to the team Florence & Molly

We would like to welcome Florence Viard & Molly Harrison to the PDD team, with both commencing their employment with us recently.

Florence joined us in October as an Animal Welfare Technologist on the TailBiteAdvice project working on the prevention of tail biting in pigs. She has already worked in the PDD looking at liquid feeding in grow-finisher pigs. In this new position, she will be monitoring pigs with long tails and using the cameras installed in the pig unit she will validate a risk assessment tool. She will also be helping to organise workshops for industry stakeholders. The project aims to develop a data-driven decision tool that will help farmers to predict tail biting events and propose solutions to prevent these events from happening.



Molly joins us as a Social Science Research Officer on the PigTail project having recently completed her Wash Scholarship. She will be interviewing pig farmers and vets to identify the barriers and facilitators to reducing routine tail docking of piglets in Ireland. She is looking forward to both gaining a better understanding of farmer's and vet's perspectives on this topic and developing the social science skills she gained in her previous project investigating consumer demand for higher welfare pig certified meat in Ireland.

