

Pig Newsletter

November 2025



Welcome

Welcome to the November edition of the Teagasc Pig Newsletter. Pig prices have slipped further this month, putting further pressure on farm margins.

As we approach the end of 2025, there are several important developments for pig producers to be aware of. This month, Emer McCrum provides a clear overview of the new Auto Enrolment Retirement Savings Scheme, which comes into effect on 1st January 2026 and will apply to all employers, including those in the pig sector.

We also highlight practical insights from the first cycle in the Alternative Finisher Building in Moorepark, showing both the benefits and the challenges of the design as the system is road-tested in real conditions.

In addition, this edition includes short updates on sector news, including the upcoming Teagasc Outlook Conference and current market developments. We hope the information provided supports your planning as we move into a new year.

This edition:

- Preparing Your Business for Ireland's New Pension Scheme
- Lessons Learned from the Alternative Finisher Building



PREPARING YOUR BUSINESS FOR IRELAND'S NEW PENSION SCHEME

Emer McCrum



The Auto-Enrolment Retirement Savings Scheme, called My Future Fund, is a new retirement savings system for employees that will be introduced on 1st January 2026. It is a state-supported savings framework, administered through payroll, with the objective of extending pension coverage to thousands of workers not currently included in existing retirement arrangements. A new public body, the National Automatic Enrolment Retirement Savings Authority (NAERSA), has been set up to administer the auto-enrolment scheme.

While the introduction of the scheme creates an additional recurring cost for employers, it will establish a clear framework for retirement saving and deliver long-term benefits in terms of both employee retention and financial stability. The scheme removes the need for employers to set up or administer a separate company pension scheme, while all employer contributions will qualify as deductible expenses for corporation tax. NAERSA will assess employee eligibility for auto-enrolment relieving employers of the responsibility



to determine whether individual staff members meet the qualifying criteria. Auto-enrolment will apply to all employees aged between 23 and 60 who are earning €20,000 or more per annum across all employments and who do not have existing supplementary pension coverage. Seasonal or part-time workers are included if their expected annual earnings meet the threshold. If employees do not meet the age and income thresholds, they still have the option to opt into the scheme and will have the same rights as an employee automatically enrolled.

Employee	Employer	Government
Year 1 to 3	1.5%	0.5%
Year 4 to 6	3%	1%
Year 7 to 9	4%	1.5%
Year 10+	6%	2%

Contributions will be fixed at the set rate and it will not be possible for you or your employees to pay more or less than this rate. Contributions will be calculated on the employee's gross earnings so anything included in the gross pay field of a payroll file will be assessable. Contributions will not be levied on any gross pay over €80,000 and employer contributions will not be subject to benefit-in-kind for the employee.

Once an employee has been identified as eligible for auto enrolment, NAERSA will send you an Automatic Enrolment Payroll Notification (AEPN) through payroll software informing you of the contribution amounts you and the employee need to pay as a percentage of gross earnings. You will then apply the AEPN and the contributions will be visible on the employee's payslip. You have several options to pay the contribution amounts to NAERSA however the easiest way will be a variable direct debit which can be set up through the auto enrolment employer portal. Contributions must be paid at the same time as the employee is paid, and contribution information must be provided to NAERSA. If an employee is on unpaid leave, contributions will not be deductible for the period of unpaid leave.

Employees must remain in for at least six months after which they have a two-month opt-out window. If they opt out, only their own contributions are refunded. Any employer and State top-ups remain in their pot. It is important to note that after two years, eligible opt-outs will be automatically re-enrolled.

Employers will be required to register with NAERSA through the Revenue portal once the system becomes available. They must ensure that employee contributions are accurately deducted from gross pay, and that both employee and employer contributions are remitted in accordance with scheme deadlines. Employers are also responsible for maintaining comprehensive records of enrolments, opt-outs and any periods of suspension to ensure full compliance. In addition, the legislation prohibits any action that could be interpreted as pressuring or discouraging employees from participating in the scheme, and NAERSA is empowered to enforce these provisions.

With the introduction of auto enrolment approaching, consult your accountant now to ensure you are adequately prepared and have the necessary supports in place once the scheme goes live. Establish a monitoring plan to ensure contributions are flowing correctly and to help keep track of important records such as opt outs. Consider holding a staff meeting in December to brief employees on what to expect (who will be affected, the impact on their pay, how their pension will accrue, and their opt-out options) to ensure your employees are well informed in advance.

"Consult your accountant now to ensure you are prepared."

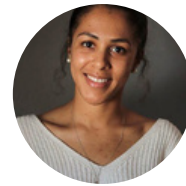
Year-end also provides an ideal opportunity to review future wage budgeting, taking into consideration the cost of employer contributions over the coming decade. Finally be sure to stay informed as you transition across to the new system by maintaining regular communication with your payroll provider for the guidance and the latest updates.





LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ALTERNATIVE FINISHER BUILDING

Keelin O'Driscoll, Melissa Cupido, Laura Boyle



In 2024 we opened a new building for finisher pigs in the Teagasc Pig Research Facility. This building was designed to particularly reduce ammonia emissions. This is achieved through a combination of solid flooring, a scraped slurry channel directing waste to an external covered tank, and an open sidewall for natural ventilation. Several of these features also offer welfare benefits to the pigs compared to conventional finisher housing in Ireland.

Incorporating these design features came at a higher construction cost than typical finisher housing. The system also requires additional day-to-day labour, particularly for scraping and managing the solid floor areas

Recently we finished the first study comparing this alternative building with our existing housing. We looked at the performance and health of finisher pigs with long, undocked tails from about 30kg to factory age.

Benefits of the alternative building

The alternative building provides several benefits for pig welfare simply due to its design. The design of the pens (long length:width ratio along with 80% solid flooring) means that pigs need more space

than the legal limit, so we stocked them at just over 1.1 m²/pig. There are also clearly defined areas for lying, feeding and toileting in the pen, and we installed feeders with 4 spaces (i.e 1 space/ 7 pigs). These factors all reduce stress on the pig compared to typical conventional pens. The open side of the building also allows for better air quality for both pigs and staff. Pigs can choose between lying in the enclosed, warm indoor area, or the brighter, fresher outdoor part of the pen. Likely due to these factors, there were numerically fewer tail-biting outbreaks in the alternative building, and the severity of tail damage was statistically lower than in the conventional pens. We also found that the pigs used less straw from the racks compared to pigs in the conventional fully slatted pens which means less labour and cost for enrichment provision. Video footage showed that pigs consistently chose to rest in the indoor area, especially under the canopy, while using the rest of the pen (outdoors) for exploration and excretion (as well as feeding and drinking). We inspected all the pigs at slaughter and found fewer swellings on the legs potentially indicating that the solid floor offered more comfort for the pigs when lying down compared to slats.

“A design aimed at lowering emissions also delivered practical welfare gains.”

Challenges

As with any new building design, there were some challenges with the alternative building. Despite the welfare-centred design some pigs soiled the solid areas. This was especially noticeable in the doorways between the outdoor and indoor area likely because of a draft caused by the positioning of the extractor fans inside. This resulted in dirty pigs, increased risk of slipping, and more locomotory issues. More antibiotic use was thus required to treat the pigs. Pigs in the alternative building reached the same finishing weight in the same time as those in the convention building but had a higher feed intake, and consequently higher feed conversion ratio (alternative 2.39, conventional 2.22). This probably reflects the slightly colder temperatures in the alternative building necessitating higher energy requirements. Additionally, pigs in the alternative building had more space to play and run, which could also have led to greater energy requirements.

What next?

In the October newsletter, Neil Turchett shared an update about a recent study trip to Austria, to learn more about alternative pig housing. Representatives from Teagasc, University College Dublin, DAFM AHl, and a number of Irish pig

farmers toured Austrian pig farms producing pigs in systems similar to the one described above at Moorepark. This proved to be a fantastic opportunity to learn how to overcome some of our challenges with the Alternative Building, while others are useful advice for new buildings only.

The Austrian pig farmers’ advice was to:

- Indoor area - Keep dark, dry and warmer (ideally bedded) than the outside area.
- Extractor fans at entrance to indoor area - Redirect the fans to pull air from the ceiling rather than the floor; this will reduce the draft at the door and consequently the risk of soiling.
- Outdoor feeding area
 - Reduce the width of the pens - otherwise pigs consider the wall opposing the feeder, as “far enough” away from their feeding area to use as a toilet. Pigs generally keep their feeding area clean and a narrower pen better encourages this natural behaviour.
 - Remove nipple drinkers from the feeders to reduce risk of water spillages in feeder area and the extra labour associated with cleaning - only provide dry feed on solid concrete areas.
- Slatted area - Drinkers should only be positioned here so that water spillages or wastage will not wet the solid concrete flooring and the pigs will be encouraged to use the area for excretion.

Interested in this type of housing?

If you are considering adopting similar features on your farm or simply would like to know more, feel free to reach out to your local Teagasc representative for guidance and practical advice.



Figure 1. A pig pen in an Austrian farm, and a pen in the Alternative building in Moorepark. The Moorepark pen is wider, with water bowls next to the solid area.

News

The Pig Edge



This month's Pig Edge podcast takes a closer look at recent market trends and what producers can expect as we move towards 2026. Emer McCrum is joined by Shane Callaghan, Procurement Officer with Rosderra Meats, who shares an update on current market conditions, outlines the outlook for the year ahead, and explains the new pig quality payment system.

In next month's Pig Edge Amy Quinn hosts Michael McKeon, who reviews the pig sector's performance in 2025 and discuss the outlook for 2026. He will unpack what happened in 2025, explain the major trends influencing the sector, and share his outlook as we move into 2026.

For more episodes and information from The Pig Edge podcast, visit: www.teagasc.ie/pigedge

Welcome Babra

Babra, originally from Uganda, she recently completed her Master's degree at the University of Galway. Her thesis used Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) to evaluate the greenhouse gas reduction potential and nutritional traits of tropical forage legume germplasm for dairy production systems in East and Southern Africa.

For her PhD, she will conduct an environmental impact assessment of pig production systems in Ireland using LCA. Her work will contribute to the development of AgNav, a national platform that provides robust sustainability assessments for Irish agriculture. AgNav is a collaboration between Teagasc, Bord Bia, and ICBF. At Teagasc, Babra is supervised by Dr. Keelin O'Driscoll and Dr. Jonathan Herron.



Outlook 2026

The Teagasc Outlook 2026 Conference will take place on Monday, 2nd December at the Teagasc Ashtown Food Research Centre in Dublin, where Teagasc specialists will present economic reviews of 2025 and forecasts for the year ahead across all major agricultural sectors, including pigs. The event provides farmers and industry stakeholders with an annual overview of key trends and developments shaping the sector. The full conference booklet will be available online at: www.teagasc.ie/publications



teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Outlook 2026
Economic Outlook for Agriculture

Date: Tuesday 2nd December 2025
10.00 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.

Venue:
Teagasc Conference Centre,
Teagasc, Ashtown, Dunsinea Lane, Dublin 15.
Eircode: D15 DY05

Agriculture and Food Development Authority

