

HOGS

by Melanie Smitbers

Introduction

The freezing nights and crisp days of Fall must bring hog slaughtering to the minds of many people. It seems that during the Depression 1930's and 1940's and before that, every farm raised at least one hog. Despite the work involved in raising the animal and the expenses of initially purchasing the hog, buying feed and having the animal slaughtered and butchered, many farmers continue to raise their own animals. This is probably because they feel they have a superior product to that available at the supermarket. The tradition of hog raising on the farmstead continues to this day.

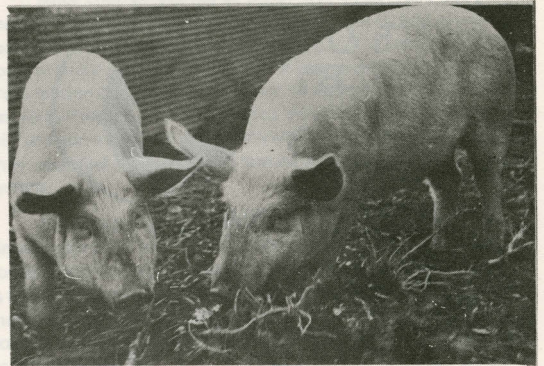
Hog raising, like everything else, has changed tremendously over the past 40 to 50 years. Whereas the slaughtering, butchering and preservation was done on the farm years ago by the farmer and friends, most hog raisers today depend on a slaughterhouse for the final product. The farmer delivers the live hog to the slaughterhouse and picks up the wrapped meat a couple of days later, ready for his freezer. Like so many things today, it is much easier for the hog raiser. But there is a price for this ease . . .

Years ago many people knew the ins and outs of slaughtering and butchering and passed this valuable knowledge along to friends and family. The number of people who still practice these skills has greatly declined. The knowledge has been specialized in the hands of the slaughterhouse workers and is a commodity for which one must pay. At least 20% of the cost of the meat is invested in the slaughtering and butchering process. When done on the farm, this extra expense is eliminated.

Being interested not only in saving the expense of a slaughterhouse, but also in developing a new homesteading skill, I approached several of my neighbors (Bill and Stella Turner, Walt and Claude Rayburn, Bea and Henry Macaulay) who had raised hogs on the farm and questioned them about hog raising, butchering and old ways of preserving the meat. Much of the information was of experiences they had raising hogs in the 1930's before electricity reached the rural areas. Most of the information was taught to them by their immediate families. There was an urgency about doing things correctly. Because, as Bea said, "You couldn't go to the store and buy things as you can today. You did it right because you were depending upon that animal for food."

Slaughtering

The hogs were most often slaughtered when they weighed about 200 pounds. Bea and Henry maintained that that was new and revolutionary for its day in the 1930's because the generation before their's favored 400 pound hogs. With a hog of that size the meat was darker and tougher and the layer of fat under the skin was quite thick, at least 4" thick. The smaller hogs were more tender and had a sweeter flavor.



Because it was important to cool the hog carcass immediately after slaughtering — there was no refrigeration available years ago — the farmers waited for a cool fall day for the slaughtering. Henry remembered slaughtering time as around Thanksgiving and last year I observed a hog butchering at the Rayburn's in November. The hogs were about six months old at this time.

At the time of slaughter, the traditional method of killing the pig was by "sticking" it or cutting its throat artery with a knife. Although this method of slaughter is now illegal for humanitarian reasons, it was traditionally favored because the hog meat was then thoroughly bled out and therefore had good flavor.

Once the hog was dead, the hair was removed from the body. At this point it was necessary to dip the pig carcass into a scalding water bath to loosen the hairs, and thus make it easier to scrape the hair off with a special tool known as a scraper. A fire was built under a large enough kettle to hold the pig carcass. Walt Rayburn checked the water temperature in his large metal tank with a thermometer. Cold and boiling water were available to stabilize the temperature at 152°. Henry Macaulay remembered that his father never used a thermometer, but checked the temperature with his hand. If he could pass his hands through the water three times without having it unbearable hot, then the water was ready and at the proper temperature.

The carcass was immersed and constantly sloshed about in the water. The hog was moved so that no spot would be scorched. If the water was too cold, the hair would not be loosened; if the water was too hot, it would "set" the hair, making it difficult to remove.

After the hog was scraped, it was hung up on hog hangers. These were a tripod affair with two hooks slightly down from the top on two of the three sapling-sized trees from which they were made. The hog's two hind leg tendons were exposed and the carcass was hung by them. After it was hung up, the carcass was shaved clean.



The final step in the slaughtering was to remove the innards. This was accomplished by a single cut the length of the hog's body on its belly side. The heart and liver could be saved for later consumption. The body cavity was washed out and the pig was allowed to hang overnight. If it was supposed to be a frosty night, the carcass was covered with a sheet to prevent freezing of the outside.

Butchering

The next day, the hog was cut up. Bea said that it was very important to have the body heat out of the animal, especially if the meat was to be canned. Meat canned before the body heat had dissipated was sure to spoil. This was true for all meat, including chicken and beef. Bea wondered why that was true, but was sure it was because she had heard of many cases of spoiled meat. Does anyone know why?

Products and Preservation

As Bea assured me several times, every part of the animal was used. The way in which she handled the different cuts of meat is described below:

The shoulders were canned in pint jars in her copper boiler. They were subjected to a 3½ hour boiling water bath.

The pork chops were eaten fresh.

Bea made 10 - 12 pounds of sausage from one hog. Bea's recipe for sausage from *The American Agriculturist* called for 3 parts of lean meat to 1 part fat. Trimmings from all over the hog, including head meat, were used in her sausage. This is her recipe:

6 pounds ground meat
 1½ ozs. fine salt (table salt)
 ½ oz. pepper
 ½ oz. sage

After the sausage was made up, Bea packed it into a stocking which she had prepared ahead of time from an old towel or sheet. The sausage was stored in the milk cooler near the ice (this was back in the days of ice cutting and ice houses) or in cool spring water. It would last two months stored in this way.

Salt pork was very popular years ago. This was made from the belly or side meat. The meat was cut into 1½ to 2 pound pieces with a dimension of approximately 6" X 4". These pieces were cut to easily fit into a 5-gallon crock, in which they were to be packed. Two to three inches of cow salt (not iodized) was placed in the bottom of the crock. The first two or three pieces of meat were put in and salt was worked around each piece, so that they did not touch each other. One inch of salt was then added between layers of two to three pieces each. The cuts of meat were packed in salt in that fashion until the crock was full. Bea estimated that between 15 and 18 pieces of meat would fit into a crock.

Head cheese was made at that time from the head meat.

Bea recommended this recipe for the sugar cure of bacons and hams. It was another *American Agriculturist* recipe:

For 100 pounds of meat —
 10 pounds of salt
 2½ pounds brown sugar
 2 oz. salt peter

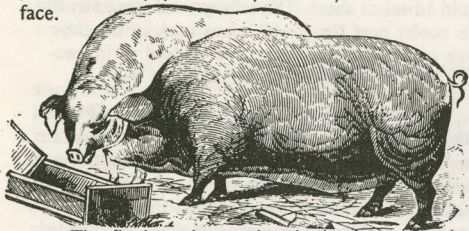
Dissolve all in 4 gallons of boiling water, let cool, cover meat.

I have seen enormous 30 to 40 gallon crocks at auctions and have wondered what they were used for. Here is the answer. The hams and bacons were

cured in them. It was necessary to store the crocks at a low temperature, most likely in the unheated cellars.

Bill Turner remarked that he had found it possible to cure beef in a crock in which pig had previously been cured, but that it was not possible to cure hog meat in a crock which had previously cured beef. He saw no reason for this phenomenon, but had discovered the principle by trial and error.

After the hams and bacon had cured sufficiently (1½ - 2 days for each pound of meat), they were removed from the crocks, wiped dry and smoked. Although many families had smokehouses (Bill and Stella Turner) others did not. Many ingenious ways were worked out to smoke the meat without the use of a smokehouse. Bea and Henry Macaulay used a 30-gallon milk can with corn cobs and hickory chips smoldering at the bottom of the can. The pieces of meat, including the hams and the bacon (which had been cut into seven or eight small pieces to make smoke penetration easier), were attached by a string to sticks crossing the top of the can. It was important that the hanging pieces did not touch each other or the smoke would not be able to circulate and penetrate all parts. When the meat was finished (it was tested by taste), it was stored in a cool, dry place. It was important that the storage not be damp or mold would develop. The meat was wrapped in waxed paper to keep air away from its surface.



The final product to be obtained from the hog was lard. The fat or lard of the pig was put through a meat grinder and heated. Bea preferred to render her lard in the oven of her stove, rather than on top of the stove. She felt that lard was whiter that way. The left-overs from the rendering could be salted and eaten as crispies.

I wondered what Bea felt about the cholesterol problem with lard. She was quick to point out that anything, including lard, used in excessive quantities, was not good. But she felt that in moderate amounts lard was not harmful and she cited at least ten people she had known who had lived into their 90's eating lard to a moderate degree.

Bea repeated the various products they obtained from their animals — head cheese, lard, salt pork, canned shoulder, cured and smoked bacon and hams, fresh pork chops, sausage — and said that nothing went to waste, not even the tail. As I saw visions of pig tail soup, Bea chuckled that pig tails made great Christmas presents. "Why sure, you get a pretty pink bow and a handsome candy box and you surprise someone with a pig tail for Christmas. It was always fun to see who got the pig tail each year."

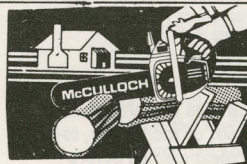
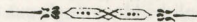
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