

History of Pork Production in Texas

John J McGlone, 2025

One large cattle rancher once told me that Texas had the most sows of any state. I thought, no, at the time Iowa had the most sows. Some years NC had the most sows. He was talking about feral swine. We have millions of them in Texas. They roam over virtually the entire state, but they are more concentrated where there is water and food (crops or plants, primarily). Feral swine were introduced nearly 500 years ago into Texas by early explorers. These swine are quite distinct from domestic pigs. Feral swine are notoriously unhealthy with many external and internal parasites. Domestic swine have few parasites as good controls are in place to cure or prevent them from getting in farm pigs/

While Texas had steady growth in pig numbers, the USA did not. In 1900, USDA reports a USA pig inventory of 61 million pigs. In 2025, pig numbers are estimated in the USA at 74 million head. But over the years, the USA pig inventory has changed very little. The range is 50 to 77 million pigs in the USA; it goes up and down with no real trend over time.

The USA population rose from 76 million people in 1900 to an estimated 337 million people in 2025 – that is an over 400% increase in human population. The pig population has not increased as much as has the human population. However, pigs “turn over” (produce more than 1 litter per year) and this increase in sow reproduction means we have more pigs produced per year in the USA today than a few decades ago. In the USA, over the past 30 years, the numbers of breeding sows has decreased in the USA, but the numbers of pigs produced is the same or more – this speaks to the increased reproductive output of the sows – fewer sows producing more pigs.

Some national events have caused an increase in pig numbers. Most notably, when we have been at war, pig fat was used for making nitroglycerin (the glycerin comes from pig fat). Pigs are used for much more than for food. Heart valves, biomedical drugs, and soon body parts (like kidneys) are likely to come from genetically modified pigs in the future.

What can be seen from the graph of pig numbers is the steady rise in pig numbers. Pigs, like the human population, increased 4-fold in Texas over the past 100 or so years.

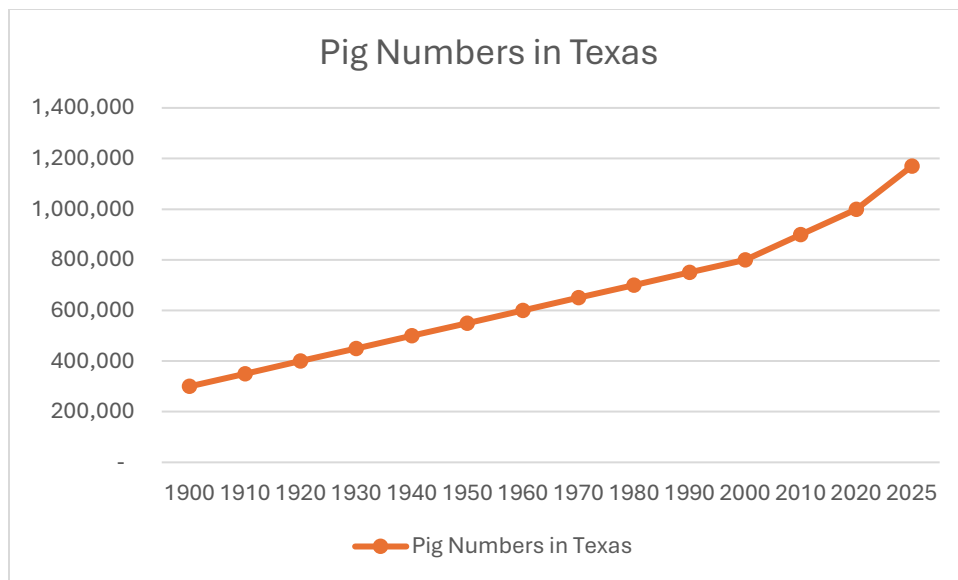


Figure 1. Source: USDA-NASS; Pig inventory in Texas over the past 100+ years.

When farms were established in the 40-year period before and after the year 1900, they often had pigs on the farm. Pigs were called the mortgage lifters. If the farmer needed to pay his/her mortgage, they would sell a few pigs. Pigs ate leftover crops and human foods. Pigs were a part of the farm ecosystem. During the 1920s, many farms had a few pigs on the farm for home consumption and to generate cash sales. Some smaller crop farmers started breeding pigs in small numbers throughout history. These farms of 100 years ago would be considered large if they had 100 pigs.

Texas Tech University was founded in 1923. In that decade, West Texas had ample rainfall and crops and livestock did very well. West Texas farmers did very well in the 1920s. Then the great depression and the dust bowl happened in the 1930s and many farms went bankrupt.

Texas in the 1940s had many farms with a few pigs. In the 1950s, something different happened and pig production grew rapidly.

Euel Liner was an early graduate of TTU (in one of the first graduating classes). Euel worked in Agriculture, on Dairy farms and he worked with pigs. His fondness for pigs had made him a well-known breeder of high-quality pigs. Euel also judged many swine shows. Euel Liner and his son-in-law Roy Poage, both TTU graduates, started Lubbock Swine Breeders in the 1950s. They had this idea that pigs could be raised indoors and it would solve many problems such as waste management, wasted feed, parasites and some diseases. They experimented with different slotted flooring. The first slats were made of oak. Then they found the oak could not be sanitized. They then moved to aluminum slats and then to concrete.

In the 1960s, Euel was interviewed for a 30 minute show that highlighted the new modern method of pork production. That video can be viewed here:

[Lubbock Swine Breeders Video Link](#) | [The Sow Housing Site](#) | [Research](#) | [Animal Welfare](#) | [TTU](#)

They realized that cotton and corn farmers did not know how to build pigs buildings or manage them. But they had land on which to spread manure. They developed different model farms, much like a housing development. You could build a 250, 500, or 750-sow farm. They had the blueprints, the construction company (it was called Hog Builders, based in Slaton, TX) and equipment. They also worked hard to have healthy pigs being one of the first people to deliver pigs by C-section to produce pigs without most diseases. And they started pig genetic selection for economically important traits. Lubbock Swine Breeders was the first company in modern times to sell breeding stock to Japan and other international countries. They were truly leaders in the industry; not just in producing pigs, but also in building farms, training people and developing healthy pigs.

In 1969, Jimmy Dean built a whole-hog sausage plant in Plainview, TX (half way between Lubbock and Amarillo). This caused many crop farmers to add new pig units to supply the plant. The standard model at that time was group housing for sows, and aluminum slats for flooring. Then Euel and Roy experimented with crates for sows. They first had sows in crates that they let out to root in sand once a day or so. Then they didn't see the need to let them out. The gestation crate was born – at least in this region. Euel and others claim to be the first people to put sows in crates. This was certainly true regionally, but pictures from the 1700s in Europe show sows in crates. They didn't invent the system, they refined it. And it took off around the world. The pigs were healthier, they didn't waste as much feed and breeding and growth were good – and getting better with more genetic selection. Lubbock Swine Breeders was sold to Dekalb Swine Breeders. Roy Paoge became the President and Euel Liner retired. Dekalb Swine was later sold to Monsanto and then to others. The Dekalb Swine brand cannot be found today.

When the Jimmy Dean plant closed in about 1978, the West Texas pig industry was strong with many medium-sized producers. They had some options to market pigs when that plant closed. They could sell into local livestock markets. Most buyers there were buying just a few pigs for home use or to supplement their income. Auction markets have a long history of paying less than if one were to deliver pigs to a plant directly. In 1978, there was a plant in OK, one in Abilene, TX and one in San Antonio. But most West Texas pigs did not use these plants. A pig buyer had a place in Lubbock on Ave A in which he bought pigs once per week (he had another location in Amarillo). He had a deal with a plant (now closed) in CA called Farmer John's. Farmer John paid the shipping so the local buyer could offer prices near market price if the pigs were of any quality. He bought about 500 pigs per week. That is three truck loads of pigs; 2 "good pigs" and 1 truck for sows and cull pigs. This business person made money as a hog buyer for several decades. Then the large farms came along and supplied a uniform pig to the California plant and put many of these these smaller farms out of business because the markets were too far away (they could send a truck to KS, NE or IA and that extra freight added to the cost of production).

In the late 1980s, a large farm (large for the day) started building a farm in Dalhart, TX for 16,800 sows. It was called National Hog Farm. They had a similar farm in NE Colorado and a farm in Nebraska. As the Dalhart farm opened, they were bought by Premium Standard Farms (PSF). PSF sold it to Smithfield. Smithfield sold it to Cargill Pork. Cargill Pork was bought by JBS (a large Brazilian company). JBS operates that farm today. That farm's Texas location now has over 60,000 sows.

Shortly later, Seaboard Foods was getting into the pig business. They built a plant in Guymon, OK that processes over 20,000 pigs per day (mostly their own pigs) and they have hundreds of farm sites in CO, KS, OK, and TX – all not too far from each other (not next door, but a mile or more apart). Smithfield also has pigs in West Texas. The graph shown has an uptick in pig numbers around 1990. This was the growth of the larger farms. Larger farms replaced many smaller farms – not just in TX, but in every state that has pigs.

Lets return to 1968

In 1968, the state of Texas funded a graduate school at TTU for the first time. Along with that, because TTU is not a land grant university with access to special state and federal funding, the legislature added something called the Swine Research Line Item when the graduate school was formed. They hired Dr. Leland Tribble as a swine Nutritionist (from Missouri). They hired a reproductive physiologist that worked with pigs (Dr. Jim Clark). And they wanted one more pig person. Originally, it was Dr. Don Orr who studied nutrition and stress and general production questions. Don Orr left for industry and a position came open. Dr. John McGlone was hired in 1984.

The legislature also funded our medical school in the early and late 1970s. Our TTU farm was located where the present Medical School is. The first farm was on campus, the second farm was at the TTU-HSC, and the third farm was built near New Deal Texas in about 1978. That farm is old now and out of date and TTU plans to replace it.

That Swine Research Line Item funded much of Dr. McGlone's early work as few funding bodies cared about animal behavior and welfare in 1984. The administration was supportive. I was told, if I just keep publishing, the funding will follow. That is good advice any day.

Today's West Texas Swine Industry

In West Texas, we have a vibrant show pig industry. These are smaller farmers who may have 2 to 100 sows; more commonly 20 or so sows. They sell young pigs to youth that will compete in Livestock shows. This show pig industry is completely separate from the commercial swine industry. The pigs look different and perform differently. But it is a part of the Texas swine industry.

Most pigs in West Texas are owned by JBS, Seaboard, and Smithfield. The data show Texas has over 1 million pigs in inventory. This means that they produce at least 2 million market pigs per year. If you count the pigs nearby (KS, OK, CO) that center in our region, over 7 million pigs per year are produced. I expect the number to grow and because they do not share inventory data often, the region may produce more than 7 million pigs per year.

West Texas is a great place to raise livestock. The weather is good. The land is flat. Not too many people live in the rural parts of the region. Natural gas lines go to CA to purchase methane from some animal manure digestors. Because of its naturally livestock-friendly nature, the Dairy industry moved in shortly after the pigs started arriving. This region is a significant producer of beef, pork and dairy products. Chickens may follow. The only real economic downside in the region are the lack of water, workers and the higher price of grain (than in the upper Midwest). If one were to study the geography, weather and natural resources, livestock would be put in this region.

West Texas (and the region) is a grain-deficit region. Grain and soy are imported from the upper Midwest (mostly). There is some logic in this approach. West Texas has a scarcity of water and plant nutrients. In West Texas, water is pumped from the ground to water and clean farms. The manure produced from the grain can be applied to local crop lands that are nutrient deficient. In this way, the water is used multiple times (water animals & to grow crops). This recycling of nutrient supports a sustainable local industry.