

Feeding the 9 billion: Animals feeding on food waste case study

THE PIG IDEA

The Pig Idea is a new campaign, started by food waste expert Tristram Stuart and the Feeding the 5000 team in partnership with chef Thomasina Miers to encourage the use of food waste to feed pigs. In addition to diverting legally permissible food waste, ultimately the campaign aims to overturn the EU ban on the feeding of catering waste, or swill, to pigs.

The Pig Idea campaign argues the following:

For thousands of years pigs have been man's perfect partner in consuming the waste that humans produce and converting it straight into calories i.e. pork. Today supermarkets talk about composting food waste or turning it into electricity but by far the most efficient thing to do with food waste is to feed it directly to pigs.

Instead we have a system where pigs are being fed food that humans could otherwise eat, and much of this feed is soy, grown on the Amazonian basin where rainforest is being cut down at an alarming rate. 97 percent of global soy production is used for animal feed and Europe now imports 40 million tonnes of soymeal a year. The amount of land needed to produce soy for the European market (since the 1999 ban on meat and bone meal being used in animal feedstuffs) is roughly equal to the area of deforestation in the Brazilian rainforest since that date.

The governments of other countries such as Japan, South Korea, China and many states in the USA recognise that the best way of turning food waste into a valuable resource is to feed it to livestock. Instead of banning the practice, the Japanese government support pig farmers who want to use food waste as feed. The resulting pork is sold at a premium as eco-pork on the same supermarket shelves from which the waste originated. In the UK, thousands of British pig farmers have gone out of business because of increases in the price of wheat, maize and soy – the principal ingredients of pig and chicken food – on the global market place where the farmers are competing with people who wish to buy these grains for their own consumption. Returning to the practice of recycling food waste for livestock feed would be a way of increasing Europe's food security for the future.

Facts & Figures

Food waste is a global crisis

A third of all food globally is wasted. All the world's nearly one billion hungry people could be lifted out of malnourishment on less than a quarter of the food that is wasted in the US and Europe. The United Nations estimates that feeding food waste instead of commercial grains to livestock could liberate enough food to feed three billion people.

We contribute to this crisis with current legislation regarding the feeding of food waste to pigs

Around 20 times more carbon dioxide emissions can be saved by feeding food waste to pigs rather than sending it for anaerobic digestion (the next best recycling option). In Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, laws encourage using food waste to feed pigs. But under European laws, feeding most food waste (such as catering waste) to pigs is banned.

Instead of consuming our waste food, European pigs are currently fed cereal crops and soy from South America

This process contributes to deforestation, land hunger and pollution. 8.3 million hectares of land is required to produce just the meat and dairy products wasted in UK homes and in US homes, shops and restaurants. That is seven times the amount of Amazon rainforest destroyed in Brazil in one year, largely for cattle grazing and soy production to export for livestock feed. The irrigation water used globally to grow food that is wasted would be enough for the domestic needs (at 200 litres per person per day) of 9 billion people - the number expected on the planet by 2050. If we planted trees on land currently used to grow unnecessary surplus and wasted food, this would offset a theoretical maximum of 100% of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel combustion.

This practice not only contributes to global hunger and environmental disaster but affects economies locally

For example, UK pig farmers may be priced out of business by expensive grain prices, when they have a ready-made food source for their livestock in the form of food waste.

What is the Pig Idea?

At the heart of The Pig Idea are three major objectives:

- Restore public confidence in the safe, efficient, cost-effective and environmentally friendly practice of feeding surplus food to pigs.

- Encourage more use of already legally permissible food waste as pig feed – for example, bread, dairy, fruit and vegetables that are unfit for human consumption – by raising awareness and understanding of this option amongst supermarkets, food businesses, Animal Health officials and pig farmers.
- Change European law to allow food waste including catering waste to be diverted for use as pig and chicken feed; and to introduce a robust legal framework for its safe processing and use to prevent the outbreak of animal diseases.