

Higher Welfare *Outdoor Bred Pork*

M&S
— FOOD —

Cranswick is a long-term supplier of Outdoor Bred pork products for M&S and, as its Director of Agricultural Strategy, Ash Gilman, explains, aspiring to the highest welfare standards at all times is a clear priority, and underpins much of the business's longer term strategy.

Pig production at Cranswick is based around a system with high welfare and environmental benefits at its heart. The Yorkshire-based company has farming businesses across Eastern England and into the Midlands. Its network of M&S Select Farms is vertically integrated into Cranswick's primary processing and retail packing sites.

The Outdoor Bred production system starts with the breeding sows who live outside all-year-round on dedicated breeding sites, explains Ash. While pregnant, the sows live in groups, but when they are due to give birth (farrow) they move into individual paddocks with ad-lib food and plenty of fresh water. The sows are well suited to live outside all year round, he adds. "It's important that they are happy outside and well capable of looking after piglets outdoors year-round. Our experienced teams are keen to ensure they support them as best they can."

Piglets stay with their mothers for 28 days before moving to a nursery facility, and then to a finishing unit. These are straw-based barns with plenty of natural ventilation. "We aim to keep weaned piglets in the groups they formed at weaning, it helps reduce stress and minimises the risk of any disease spread."

Cranswick adheres to the RSPCA Assured certification standards, but aspires to go above and beyond, explains Ash. "Our stocking rates are slightly lower than required, giving our breeding sows as much space as we can. We want to be as extensive as possible without causing inefficiencies in terms of labour, but also in terms of our pigs' carbon footprint."

Cranswick also has strict biosecurity policies to avoid disease spread between sites, while the location of its farms, including the processing plants, means that the travel time is significantly below the maximum allowed stated by RSPCA Assured. "Every unit has a health plan drawn up with our vets. These help us stay one step ahead of any issues and provides a constant focus around continuous improvement on the health and welfare of our pigs."



Having highly-skilled and motivated employees is another important element of maintaining high welfare standards. "We pride ourselves on our standards of training which ensures that skills and expertise pass through the business."

Whilst producing healthy pigs is important, increasing the wider focus on the environment has become a strategy embedded in the business since 2019. For example, establishing grass and clover mixes under the breeding units, has delivered numerous benefits, reducing soil erosion and creating important wildlife habitat, but also offers enrichment for the pigs. Ash says: "We have seen sows nesting down to farrow in the clover rather than their arks as this feels more natural to them. Meanwhile the grass and clover is quietly sequestering carbon back into the soil helping to reduce our pigs' carbon footprint. It's a win-win for everyone."

"As a producer of premium pork and poultry products, animal welfare underpins everything, but we need those long-term supplier relationships in order to successfully achieve this year round, be it independent pig vets, feed suppliers, nutritionists and building suppliers."

"There are always new ideas coming through the business and on going trials so we have a constant focus on how we can improve animal health and welfare further."