Berkshire Pig Production and Marketing

Introduction

Berkshire pigs provide true ‘heritage’ pork. They were recognized and prized for their eating qualities over 300 years ago in England. They have the oldest recorded swine pedigree history in the U.S., starting in 1875. The Berkshire niche pork market is expanding, both for export to Japan and the growing domestic market in the United States. The unique meat quality of pork from purebred Berkshire pigs gives consumers a superior eating experience. Berkshire pork is darker colored, tastier, more tender, and contains more marbling than crossbred commodity pork.

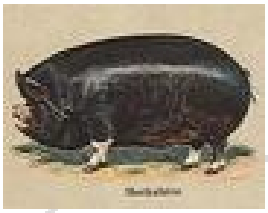
Japanese consumers have a special name for the Berkshire breed. They call it *kurobuta*, or “black pig”. Because pork from the purebred Berkshire is so tender, juicy and flavorful, the Japanese have long recognized the value of Berkshire pork and are willing to pay a premium for it. Most of the 100% Pure Berkshire pork produced in the United States has been exported to Japan.

The American Berkshire Association offers a third party certification program that includes certification of herds, packers and processors to assure consumers that 100% Pure Berkshire pork is provided.

Copycat pork marketing groups claim 100% pure Berkshire with ‘testimonials’ or the use of flawed DNA tests. However, existing DNA tests do not detect the difference between purebred Berkshire and Berkshire crossbreds. Some pigs with no Berkshire genetic ancestry will also ‘pass’ these DNA tests. Dr. Rodger Johnson, University of Nebraska Swine Geneticist, has prepared a scientific literature review of the DNA tests. This review is available on the ABA website – www.americanberkshire.com.

When non-Berkshire pigs are represented as purebred Berkshire pigs both producers and consumers of pork from purebred Berkshires suffer. Premium marketing of pork from non-100% Berkshire pigs puts the purebred Berkshire producer at a real economic disadvantage. Crossbred sows will raise more pigs and the crossbred pigs grow faster. These reduced production expenses allow non-Berkshire producers to accept lower pig and pork market premiums. However, the lower meat quality of crossbred pork results in poor consumer eating experiences. Unhappy consumers create damage to the 100% Pure Berkshire reputation in the foodservice marketplace, reducing market pig premiums for legitimate 100% Pure Berkshire pigs and pork.

The History of the Berkshire Breed



Three hundred years ago – so legend has it – the Berkshire hog was discovered by Oliver Cromwell's army, in winter quarters at Reading, the county seat of the shire of Berks in England. After the war these veterans carried the news of the wonderful hogs of Berks throughout the world. Larger in size than any other swine of that time the Berkshire pig produced hams and bacon of rare quality and flavor. This is said to have been the beginning of the fame of the Reading Fair as a market place for pork products.

This original Berkshire was reddish or sandy colored hog, sometimes spotted. Later this basic stock was improved with the addition of Siamese and Chinese pig genetics, resulting in the black body with six white points of hair and skin color pattern. This was the only addition of genetics that has gone into the Berkshire breed within the time of recorded livestock history. Since 1875 the Berkshire breed has been maintained as a closed pure breed in the U.S. The Berkshire breed is international, with breed registries maintained in Australia, Canada, England, and the US. Breeding animals and/or semen have been exchanged by breeders between these countries.

The excellent carcass quality of the Berkshire hog made it a favorite with the upper class of English farmers. For years the Royal Family kept a large Berkshire herd at Windsor Castle. A famous Berkshire boar of a century ago was named Windsor Castle, having been farrowed and raised within sight of the towers of the royal residence. This boar was exported to the U.S. in 1841 creating a stir in the rural press which has seldom been equaled. From these writings, it appears that he must have weighed around 1,000 pounds at maturity. His offspring were praised for their increased size, along with their ability to finish at any age.

According to the best available records the first Berkshires were brought to this country in 1823. They were quickly absorbed into the general hog population because of the marked improvement they created when crossed with common stock. In 1875, a group of Berkshire breeders and importers met in Springfield, Illinois, to establish a way of keeping the Berkshire breed pure. These agricultural leaders of the day felt the Berkshire should stay pure for improvement of swine already present in the United States and not let it become only a portion of the "Common Hog" of the day. On February 25 of the same year the American Berkshire Association was founded, becoming the first Swine Registry to be established in the world. This society drew forth an enthusiastic response from men working with the breed both in this country and in England. The first hog ever recorded was the boar, Ace of Spades, bred by Queen Victoria. The American Berkshire Association in West Lafayette, Indiana (www.americanberkshire.com) maintains the records and registry of the most influential breed of swine in the history of the world.

Most of the leading herds in this country were using some imported breeding stock in 1875. Therefore, it was agreed upon when the society was established that only hogs directly imported from established English herds, or hogs tracing directly back to such imported animals, would be accepted for registration. The breed today is descended from these animals recorded at the time or from stock later imported. The most recent US importation of English Berkshires was in 2005. Imported boars have been made available to all breeders via artificial insemination.

In 1876, in the first Breed Publication, the following was printed; “The Berkshire meat is better marbled than that of any other breed of swine. That is it has a greater proportion of lean freely intermixed with small, fine streaks of fat making the hams, loins, and shoulders sweet, tender, and juicy. This renders the whole carcass not only the more palatable to persons in general, but is unquestionably the healthiest food. Considering these facts, the Berkshire, above all others, should be the favorite swine among us. We ought to take all possible pains in breeding Berkshires in such a manner as to enhance this superior quality, not only for the home use but also for the foreign market.”

The Berkshire Breed paved the way for improved swine production in the United States and Europe. Berkshires have had great influence upon the U.S. swine industry in the past 100 plus years, and the American Berkshire Association has made people aware of the importance of purebred animals. Type and desired traits have changed in the swine industry due to economic and market needs. Berkshires have played a major role in the Swine Industry. At the Chicago International Livestock Expositions in all breed competition, Berkshires won champion individual carcass five years in a row and 11 out of 13 years. Berkshires won champion car lot 8 years in a row and 15 out of 18 years. These winnings have never been duplicated at any major show by any other breed.

During the past several years the Berkshire has made great improvement in meeting the demands of the swine industry. Selection pressure has been applied toward traits of great economic importance – fast and efficient growth, reproductive efficiency and leanness without losing meat quality.

The modern Berkshire’s characteristics have been established and purified over a very long period of time. Breeders have been improving the breed for centuries. The Berkshire pig is a splendid example of a heritage breed of livestock.

Berkshire Production Characteristics:

General Production Characteristics

Berkshires are very hardy and are adaptable to both outdoor and indoor production. Berkshire sows have an excellent disposition and are quite docile. Berkshire boars have excellent libido and their semen quality is superior. Berkshires are characterized by producing a low litter size born, having slower weight gains with a poorer feed efficiency as well as being fatter than crossbred commercial hogs. As with all purebreds the heterosis (crossbred vigor) advantage for production traits is much reduced in purebred Berkshires.

Available on the American Berkshire Association web site are the Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) for Berkshire boars that have had progeny groups evaluated in the National Barrow Show® Sire Progeny Tests. These annual tests are sponsored by the National Association of Swine Records and Hormel Foods. More Berkshire sires have been evaluated than any other breed. Iowa State University geneticists calculate the EPD’s for Average Daily Gain, 10th Rib

Backfat, Hunter L (color), Intramuscular Fat (IMF), pH, Cooking Loss, Instron (mechanical tenderness), and sensory Tenderness and Juiciness scores. The American Berkshire Association prints the top 10 boars for each trait in the Breeder's Digest.

Litter Size (LS)

Average litter size across all parities for purebred Berkshire sows will range from 2 to 16 pigs born. Under optimal nutrition, health, breeding and management programs an average of 9.0 pigs born alive and a weaned average of 7.0 to 8.0 pigs per litter is an achievable goal for the purebred Berkshire sow herd. First and second parity females are likely to have 0.6 and 0.3 fewer pigs per weaned litter, respectively.

While calculation formulas to measure pigs per sow per year vary between swine record keeping programs, a Berkshire sow herd is capable of producing from 10 to 15 pigs per sow per year, or about 70% of the production of crossbred commercial sow herds. It is very difficult to achieve greater than 15 when the analysis is calculated by seasonal estrus × conception × live born × pre-weaning mortality. Litter size weaned is a function of genetic line, nutrition program, reproduction management and production management. Factoring in the nursery and finisher death losses, the number of pigs marketed per sow per year may be in the range of 10 to 14 pigs, or about 70% of the output of crossbred commercial herds. Litter size farrowed and weaned varies greatly between producers due to management and production system capabilities.

Berkshire breeders have observed that the gestation period for the Berkshire female may be slightly longer than observed in other breeds. The gestation period may range from 113 days to as long as 120 days. Typically, the gestation period for the Berkshire sow will be 116 to 118 days.

Breeder observations also suggest that the Berkshire sow may exhibit a more pronounced seasonal breeding depression in the summer months which can result in a variable monthly farrowing rate that may range from 40% to 85% during the year. Estrus expression and detection may be more of a challenge for Berkshires housed in enclosed facilities, possibly since few U.S. Berkshire sow herds have historically been selected in and maintained in enclosed facilities. Farrowing rate and estrus detection limitations result in more non-productive days for the Berkshire sow than the maternal purebred or crossbred sow.

Feed Efficiency (FE)

Feed efficiency (pounds of feed/pound of gain) of purebred Berkshire pigs will be poorer than commercial crossbred pigs. As a rule, the FE will be approximately 10 to 20% greater. Purebred pigs may be more susceptible to disease than crossbred pig; therefore, feed efficiency differences may be much larger if there are herd health problems. Growing pig feed conversion is generally in the range of 310 to 350 lbs of feed for each 100 lbs of body weight gain. Distillers Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS) should not be fed to purebred Berkshire pigs because DDGS contributes to soft carcass fat issues that undermine premium pork markets.

Days to 250 lb. (D)

From birth to a 250 lb. market weight, groups of purebred Berkshire pigs will average approximately 180 to 200 days of age. Sub-groups of market pigs will reach market weight as early as 165 days of age or as late as 220 days of age. Groups of purebred pigs have greater variation in growth rate than groups of crossbred pigs which complicates both pig flow through facilities and also marketing plans and logistics.

Backfat (BF)

The purebred Berkshire market hog at 250 lbs will have 0.70 to 1.30 inches of tenth rib carcass backfat, while an average of 1.0 inch or less is likely. Gilts will average 0.20 inches less backfat than barrows. Growing pig diet composition and variation in genetic lines within the Berkshire breed will influence the leanness of the pig.

Loin Muscle Area (LMA)

Loin muscle area for the purebred Berkshire market hog at 250 lbs will typically range from 5.0 to 7.0 square inches with an average of approximately 5.50 to 6.00 square inches. Gilts will average 0.50 square inches more LMA than barrows. In consumer acceptance studies the LMA of Berkshire pigs is a desirable fresh loin muscle size.

National Barrow Show® (NBS) Progeny Test Results

The National Barrow Show® Progeny Test is used to evaluate sire lines within a purebred breed. Eight pigs from the same sire, representing at least three litters are tested. The progeny test begins when the sire group averages 70 lbs. Pigs are slaughtered at 240 lbs. Average results for some selected traits from the 2003 through 2005 Berkshire progeny tests are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Growth rate, carcass characteristics and meat quality index values for National Barrow Show purebred Berkshire pigs and pork.

Year	Number of Sire Lines	Average Daily Gain	Backfat @ 10th rib	Loin Muscle Area	Muscle Quality Index
2003	22	1.68	0.92	5.35	53.21
2004	18	1.70	0.90	5.75	53.13
2005	11	1.67	0.77	5.71	49.22

NPB – National Genetic Evaluation Terminal Line Program Results

The National Genetic Evaluation Terminal Line Program conducted by the National Pork Board was completed in 1994. Nine different sire lines, including the Berkshire, were compared for growth traits, carcass traits, loin meat quality traits, and loin eating quality. Berkshire was the best breed for loin meat quality and eating quality; however, the carcass composition traits were relatively poor when compared with the other breeds/lines tested due to greater backfat and less loin muscle area. Growth rate for Berkshire pigs was average. The results of this study demonstrated that Berkshire pigs produce pork with superior muscle and eating qualities.

Selection, Sources and Availability of Berkshire Breeding Stock

Select purebred Berkshire breeding animals that display large skeletal frame size with adequate bone. Frame size indicates the ability to achieve heavier market weights with less backfat. Feet and leg soundness is important for modern Berkshire production.

Berkshire breeding animals are available from ABA member breeders who raise and record purebred Berkshire animals. Potential producers of Berkshire hogs should purchase breeding animals from purebred Berkshire producers who can supply production data, meat quality information, pedigree history and herd health information. Show ring performance may not imply excellent production and meat quality attributes.

Excellent quality breeding animals are available; however, availability of large groups of gilts may be limited due to the small herd size of many purebred breeders. High-quality semen from purebred Berkshire boars is available through many elite, reputable U.S. boar studs. Purchase prices for purebred Berkshire boars may be $500 or more, with the price of gilts in the $200 - $350 price range, depending on gilt age and size and the number of gilts purchased. Contact the American Berkshire Association for a current listing of Berkshire Breeders.

Berkshire Pork Quality

The focus on meat quality remains the foundation of the Berkshire breed. Purebred Berkshire pigs produce chops, roasts and other pork cuts that are well marbled and consistently sweet, tender, juicy and highly palatable. Berkshire pork receives a premium status due to its superior eating qualities.

The National Barrow Show® meat quality results confirm the premium position of the 100% Pure Berkshire pork. Meat quality tests from 1990 – 1999 for sensory quality attributes among the eight major pure swine breeds are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Berkshire pork rankings for Sensory Quality[1]

Attribute	Benefit	Berkshire Rank
High Ultimate pH Score	Relates to low cooking loss, better water-holding capacity, high degree of tenderness	First in 6 of 7 measures
Loin Firmness / Drip Loss	Improved processing quality, tenderness	First in 4 of 4 measures
Meat Color	Consumers consistently prefer darker pork	First in 5 of 7 measures
Cooked Loin Quality	High scores for intramuscular fat percent, tenderness and juiciness all predict better consumer satisfaction	First in 4 of 5 measures

Berkshire pork is consistently greater in ultimate pH and has a darker muscle quality score than most purebred breeds. A greater ultimate pH value is usually associated with a darker muscle score. Both traits, ultimate pH and color, are predictors of eating quality and satisfaction.

Berkshire pork quality can be compared relative to other pure breeds using the data presented in Tables 3 and 4 that was generated from the National Barrow Show® (NBS) Sire Progeny Test program from 1991 to 2004. The data was compiled and presented at the 2004 National Swine Improvement Federation Annual Meeting by Dr. Goodwin (www.nsif.org).

Table 3. Breed differences for average daily gain (ADG), yield, carcass length, loin muscle area (LMA) and carcass tenth rib backfat (BF10) from the National Barrow Show® Progeny Test (1991 through 2004) (Goodwin, 2004)

Breed	ADG, lbs/day (b)	Yield % (b)	Length, in. (b)	LMA, sq. in. (b)	BF10, in. (a)
Berkshire	***1.74 bc***	***72.8 d***	***31.9 cd***	***5.53 e***	***1.13 d***
Chester White	1.71 cd	73.4 ab	31.8 d	5.75 d	1.13 d
Duroc	1.79 a	72.4 e	32.0 c	6.12 bc	0.90 b
Hampshire	1.68 d	73.0 cd	31.9 cd	6.56 a	0.85 a
Landrace	1.79 a	73.2 bc	32.8 a	6.03 bc	0.93 b
Poland China	1.77 ab	72.6 de	31.9 cd	5.74 d	1.08 cd
Spot	1.71 cd	73.4 ab	31.9 cd	5.95 cd	1.02 c
Yorkshire	1.76 ab	73.6 a	32.5 b	6.17 b	0.90 b

a, b, c, d, e, - Least squares means within a column with the same superscript letter are not different (> 0.05)
(a) Low score is desired
(b) High score is desired

[1] American Berkshire Association

Table 4: Breed differences for pork loin intramuscular fat percentage (IMF), loin pH, Minolta color, cooking loss, sensory juiciness score, and sensory tenderness score from the National Barrow Show® Progeny Test (1991 through 2004) (Goodwin, 2004)

Breed	IMF, % (b)	Ultimate pH (b)	Minolta, (a)	Cooking Loss % (a)	Juiciness (b)	Tenderness (b)
Berkshire	***2.51 b***	***5.68 a***	***25.0 a***	***20.8 a***	***6.1 a***	***7.3 a***
Chester White	2.39 bc	5.70 a	26.4 b	22.2 b	5.8 b	6.6 bc
Duroc	3.07 a	5.58 b	26.7 b	23.4 cd	5.4 c	6.3 cd
Hampshire	2.09 de	5.58 b	24.2 a	22.9 bc	5.8 ab	6.8 b
Landrace	1.90 e	5.47 c	29.4 d	24.0 d	5.0 d	6.6 bc
Poland China	2.18 cd	5.61 b	26.1 b	22.3 b	5.4 c	6.3 cd
Spot	2.37 bc	5.55 b	27.0 b	22.9 bc	5.3 cd	5.9 d
Yorkshire	1.70 f	5.47 c	28.6 c	23.8 cd	4.9 d	6.3 cd

a, b, c, d, e, f, - Least squares means within a column with the same superscript letter are not different (<>0.05)
(a) Low score is desired
(b) High score is desired

In a consumer research trial conducted by Larry McMullen, ISU Extension Swine Field Specialist and as outlined in the 2006 Iowa State University Animal Industry Report – A.S. Leaflet R2056 – "Sensory Preferences of Consumers for High pH, Low pH Commodity Pork Loins and Berkshire Pork Loins", consumers evaluated high and low pH commodity pork loins with Berkshire pork loins. The result of this consumer study is illustrated in table 5.

Table 5: (McMullen, 2006) Consumer Loin Evaluation Scores
(1 to 9 scoring system: 1 = Dislike extremely, 5 = neither like nor dislike, 9 = Like extremely)

	Loin sample		
	Commodity High pH	Commodity Low pH	Purebred Berkshire
Overall acceptance	7.39 a	5.93 b	7.13 a
Tenderness	8.05 a*	5.77 b	7.37 a*
Juiciness	6.79 a	4.51 b	6.39 a
Flavor	7.08 ab*	6.25 a	7.31 b*

Means having different superscript are different, p <0.01
Means with * differ, p<0.05

As indicated, there was no significant difference in overall acceptance between the High pH commodity and purebred Berkshire loin eating quality indicators, but a difference was noted when comparing both to the eating quality of the Low pH commodity loins. Loins from High pH

commodity and Berkshire origin were preferred over the low pH commodity loins for tenderness and were also significantly superior for juiciness. Loins from Berkshire pigs were preferred for flavor.

With the excellent pork quality exhibited by 100% Pure Berkshire pork and the consumer satisfaction derived from Berkshire pork, chefs are demanding Berkshire pork for preparation in up-scale restaurants. U.S. chefs such as Emeril Lagasse, Thomas Keller, and Wolfgang Puck are talking up and desiring Berkshire pork. *The French Laundry* in Yountville, California, has gone to great lengths to obtain purebred Berkshire pork, says chef Corey Lee. "It is a very specific taste," he said. "It doesn't have the generic mild taste of most market pork". And Michael Kaplan, chef at *Strata* in New York says Berkshire Pork has "a natural juiciness to it that you can't compare to any other pork." Also, in recent years, many national pork barbeque contests have been won with Berkshire as the featured pork product.

American Berkshire Association (ABA)

American Berkshire Association (ABA) - With more than 300 members across the United States, the American Berkshire Association (ABA) is the official national registry for the Berkshire breed of pigs. According to its mission statement, the ABA has two primary functions:

- Promote the Berkshire breed of hogs
- Maintain breed purity though registration of purebred Berkshires

Based in West Lafayette, Indiana, the association has been committed to both mission points with equal fervor since it was founded in 1875. The genetic history of each registered Berkshire pig can be traced with the ABA's computerized pedigree system.

Berkshire Meat Products, LLC (BMP)

Berkshire Meat Products, LLC (BMP) - Berkshire Meat Products, LLC (BMP) is a wholly owned subsidiary and the marketing arm of the American Berkshire Association.

The mission of Berkshire Meat Products, LLC is to market consistently high quality, pedigree-certified Berkshire pork products through partners in the pork chain so that consumers worldwide can enjoy a healthful, memorable dining experience.

BMP manages pedigree-based certification programs and oversees licensing and sales relationships with pork packers, processors, distributors and premium foodservice operations for both domestic and export markets.

The BMP also conducts market research, including missions to Japan. The BMP representatives meet with U.S. and Japanese government regulatory and trade officials and key operators within the Japanese pork business chain[2].

Berkshire Niche Pork Marketing – Past and Present

The American Berkshire Gold Program was the original niche market pork program that was started in 1994. This program specified market pigs with at least 50% Berkshire genetics. The premium trait promoted was pork muscle quality. The collapse of the Japanese economy in 1998, along with a meat marketing scandal in Japan, and Berkshire breed verification and genetic identity issues caused this program to lose its integrity and market premiums in the Japanese markets. The American Berkshire Gold certification mark is a registered certification mark.

The Royal Berkshire program was started in 1998 and was marketed as 100% Purebred Berkshire to upscale white cloth restaurants in the United States. Some dining establishments were secured for this program but it never did gain momentum. At one time approximately 5 to 8 pigs per week were marketed through this program. This program was replaced by the current 100% Pure Berkshire Pork program

Original Certified 100% Pure Berkshire label (1998-2004)

The 100% Pure Berkshire program began in 1998 to replace the American Berkshire Gold certification mark for Japanese marketing due to the genetic integrity problems in the American Berkshire Gold Program. Because of the integrity problems, the Japanese ruled that only purebred Berkshire pigs could produce kurobuta pork for the Japan market. The 'blue label' has not been used since 2004.

Current ABA Certified 100% Pure Berkshire Pork certification mark (2004 - present)

This certification mark is registered by the ABA. The 100% Pure Berkshire pork program, including certification of herds, packers and processors, is being promoted and expanded in the Japanese market as well as in the domestic U.S. restaurant and consumer markets. Labels can be purchased from the ABA/BMP office provided all requirements are met.

[2] American Berkshire Association

Another label including the certification mark is available from the ABA. This label may be affixed to meat boxes and/or meat packages. Labels can be purchased from the ABA/BMP office provided all requirements are met.

The Certified 100% Pure Berkshire Program:

What is the ABA Certification for the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program?

The American Berkshire Association Certification program is a third party auditing program to ensure the integrity of the 100% Pure Berkshire Program. This is accomplished by the registration and certification of pigs by the American Berkshire Association. The 100% Pure Berkshire Pork retains its rich flavor and texture reputation only because of the uncompromising commitment of the American Berkshire Association. All producers and processors using the American Berkshire Association certification mark are inspected and certified. The certification mark verifies that 100% Pure Berkshire Pork is genuine, with pure Berkshire genetic heritage and is traceable to its farm of origin. The 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program relies on the pedigree registration of all animals with the ABA and annual herd inspections to substantiate the claim of 100% Pure Berkshire Pork.

General Program Requirements

As part of a continuing effort to improve meat quality, participants in the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program are required to DNA test all Berkshire boars used as sires to ensure they do not have mutant HAL 1843* genes and/or mutant Rendement Napole genes.

The goal of the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork program is to assure consumers of a “quality dining experience”. To accomplish this goal the ABA has developed a certification program to ensure that all pork sold with the 100% Pure Berkshire certification mark has been produced by pigs that are offspring of purebred ABA pedigreed Berkshire sires and dams.

To enhance the credibility of the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork program for both domestic and international markets the ABA/BMP audits and verifies that pork is produced by a process that guarantees it is:

- Berkshire pork from animals whose parents are purebred, pedigreed Berkshires as specified in the American Berkshire Association's breed criteria.
- Traceable to source farms.

General Policies

Participating members, directors, officers and staff of the ABA and BMP adhere to the following policies of the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program[3]:

- The objective of the American Berkshire Association is to ensure that all pork marketed in the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program is harvested from pigs with purebred, pedigreed, registered Berkshire sires and dams.
- 100% of the producer suppliers and packers receive yearly onsite re-evaluations that verify all products originate from offspring from breeding stock that meet the criteria established by the American Berkshire Association.
- All participating producers and licensed packers receive regular training on the most current policies of the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program.
- The Management Review Committee must approve all program certification and training officers.
- All Berkshire sires are found to be free of the mutant HAL 1843* and mutant Rendement Napole genes.
- All breeding animals and market hogs are ear-notched for identification according to the ABA-approved notching chart.
- All breeding animals are identified with ABA-approved ear tags.
- All Commercial Berkshire herds participating in the program will be assigned a unique herd number. Registered herds must comply with the breed standards for ear notching.
- Animals owned by one owner, but transferred between sites must be documented to include: the location of all sites under the producers' control, documentation of the animal transfers between sites (this may be done by using either internal management records, contracts documenting the animals on feed, or the use of the feeder pig transfer forms).
- Animals transferred between producers must be documented using the 'feeder pig transfer form' and/or pedigrees.
- All pork qualifying for the program is from Berkshire hogs traceable to source farms.
- Any animal that is disqualified from the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program is purple-tagged, segregated, identified and sold outside the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program, with records retained that demonstrate final disposition.
- All intellectual property associated with the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program, including but not limited to trademarks, certification marks and labels, is owned by the American Berkshire Association and may be used by licensees and sub-licensees only according to the terms of licensing agreements.

[3] American Berkshire Association

- Licensed packers agree to segregate qualifying hogs and the pork they produce from non-qualifying animals and pork.
- Licensed packers agree to follow requirements for use of certification marks, labels and marketing materials associated with the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork program.
- Licensed packers will need to complete the documented program for the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program.
- Licensed processors, distributors, foodservice suppliers and retail outlets agree to follow guidelines for use of labels and marketing materials associated with the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork program.
- Operators of certified herds and program licensees must retain relevant records for at least one year.

Why be certified by ABA?

American Berkshire Association certification allows the use of the ABA 100% Pure Berkshire Pork certification mark and all of the rights and privileges of the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program when supplying 100% Pure Berkshire Pork to the consumer.

A major export market for 100% Pure Berkshire Pork is in Japan. The 100% Pure Berkshire Pork must meet Japanese standards. There is ZERO tolerance for drug residues. Effective May 29, 2006 Japan implemented new maximum residue limits (MRLs) for agricultural chemicals, antibiotics and feed additives in imported meat and meat products. Producers need to check with their specific packer for details of the MRLs. Information can also be obtained from the National Pork Board web site (www.pork.org/producers/JapanMRL.aspx). Presence of drug residues in pork exported to Japan can result in heavy fines and a market ban for the packer. Therefore, 100% Pure Berkshire Pork producers must manage drug usage very carefully.

Proper management, handling and trucking of market hogs is important. All producers should adhere to the National Pork Board Pork Quality Assurance Plus (PQA Plus) and the Transportation Quality Assurance (TQA) programs (www.pork.org) to assure high quality animals are delivered to packing plants.

Conclusion / Summary

The future is bright for 100% Pure Berkshire Pork. The Japan export trade is an established market and U.S. domestic demand is increasing as consumers experience the Berkshire flavor.

Berkshire pig production characteristics (feed efficiency, backfat, % lean, litter size, etc) are economic challenges. Market premiums for both pigs and pork must be secured to maintain purebred Berkshire pig production.

To secure a dependable premium market producers should consider entering into marketing groups and/or developing contract arrangements with marketing groups that go from producer to purveyor. Producers raising purebred Berkshire pigs must have excellent management skills. Raising purebred Berkshire pigs for commodity markets is not profitable.

The future depends upon maintaining consumer confidence in the 100% Pure Berkshire Pork identity and it's assurance of premium quality pork. The American Berkshire Gold program failed because suppliers labeled any pork as 'Berkshire' to fill meat orders. Berkshire pork producers must be concerned with the integrity of their marketers as they consider their business investments.

Marketing success depends on three fundamental questions:

- Is the consumer having an excellent pork eating experience?
- Are consumers confident the pork really is 100% Pure Berkshire Pork?
- Will the supply of 100% Pure Berkshire Pork be able to meet the consumer demand?

Organizations:
American Berkshire Association, PO Box 2436, West Lafayette, Indiana 47996-2436, Phone: (765) 497-3618, web site - www.americanberkshire.com, Amy Smith, Secretary/Treasurer

Berkshire Meat Products, LLC, 1769 US 52 West, PO Box 2436, West Lafayette, Indiana 47906, Phone: (317) 497-3618

Magazines & Manuals:
Breeders Digest
(Official publication of the Berkshire, Chester White, Poland China and Spot breeds - Published bi-monthly)

100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program – Program Manual
100% Pure Berkshire Pork Program – Producer Training Manual
American Berkshire Association – Member Handbook (available via the ABA web site)

Web Sites:
American Berkshire Association and Berkshire Meat Products, LLC - www.americanberkshire.com

- Agricultural Marketing Resource Center - www.agmrc.org/commodity/livestock/pork
- National Pork Board - www.pork.org
- National Pork Board Niche Market - www.nichepork.org
- NPB – Japanese Drug Reside Levels - www.pork.org/producers/JapanMRL.aspx
- National Pork Producers Council - www.nppc.org
- U S Meat Export Federation - www.usmef.org

Sections of this paper have been revised from "Berkshire Niche Market Opportunity Guidelines" - By Larry K. McMullen, Iowa State University Extension Swine Field Specialist