

Alpine Pig Production – Improving Advisory Services through a Practical Guide

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Swiss alpine farms have a long tradition in using whey to fatten pigs. Whey is a cheese production by-product, so using it helps support a circular economy. Traditionally, Alpine pig husbandry knowledge was passed on informally. Today, rising staff turnover is creating significant gaps. Training for Alpine staff focuses largely on cattle and cheese-making, leaving pig management underrepresented. This creates gaps in production knowledge and can delay the detection of management problems.

The study developed a practical guide to help Alpine staff and advisors manage pigs during the summer season.

Materials and Methods

The guide covers key topics for newcomers and experienced operators alike. It draws on a literature review, written inquiries to feed suppliers, and two expert workshops using a focus group methodology.

Results

The literature review revealed a clear gap: research on alpine pig production is limited and that staff often lack access to reliable information. The resulting German-language guideline is divided into two main parts:

Part 1 focuses on preparations before pigs are moved to the alp. It covers legal requirements, infrastructure, schedules, market aspects considerations, ration planning, complementary feed and whey treatment. Part 1 also addresses transport, documentation, vaccinations, deworming, and medication management.

Part 2 focuses on herd management on the alp. It offers practical recommendations on feeding, from adapting pigs to whey-based diets to adjusting rations as needed. A core element is a daily checklist that helps staff monitor and individual animal status systematically.

Table 1: Daily check list for alpine pig production

Barn checklist	Barn checklist
Overall impression ■ The animals are curious and alert (effect of the group). ■ All the animals stand up when the pen is entered. ■ The pigs have curled tails = healthy. ■ No animal stands out due to rapid breathing or coughing. ■ The animals are neither too cold nor too warm (lying behaviour). ■ There are no signs of diarrhoea (faeces on the walls, liquid faeces on the floor).	Health ■ There are no visible injuries (possible cannibalism). ■ The animals do not have any sunburn on their skin.
Nutrition and water ■ All the animals rush to the trough at feeding time. * If there is an animal standing apart or not coming to the trough at feeding time? > Mark and monitor it. ■ The feed trough was empty after the last feeding. * If yes: Give the same amount or more. * If no: Reduce the amount. ■ All the animals have full bellies (feed intake). * Are there any lambs with empty stomachs? > If so: mark and examine them. ■ The drinking trough is running and supplying clean water.	Hygiene ■ The porridge is hygienic. * Taste (slightly tart, pleasant on the palate).
Musculoskeletal System ■ The pigs have straight backs (a curved back is a sign of poor health). ■ The animals have a confident gait and posture. ■ There are no signs of lameness or swelling in the joints.	Stable work ■ The dung area has been cleared and is clean. ■ The resting area is dry and has sufficient bedding. There are ■ activities available and they are in good working order.
	Weekly/periodically ■ The exercise area and pasture fencing are in good condition. ■ Live weight and weight gain are monitored. ■ The silage feed line is clean. ■ If necessary, if the silage tastes bad: the pH of the silage has been checked using indicator strips or a PET bottle test has been carried out.



As information on alpine pig farming remains scarce, the developed guideline should now be tested in practice. Distribution to selected alpine farms for one season, followed by a user survey, would allow evaluation and refinement of the guide.