**Everything but the Oink**

In 2003, Porcine County producer Michael Snoutster was rushed to Scott & White Hospital in Temple with heart failure. Following examinations and doctors’ consultations, extensive surgery was performed on Mr. Snoutster. When Mr. Snoutster was able to receive visitors, several of his fellow rancher and auction barn buddies came to see him bearing gifts. In the gift basket were a jar of pickled pigs’ feet, a bag of pork skins, a cured ham, a football, and a box of crayons. Accompanying the basket was a card, with a smiling pig on the front. Mr. Snoutster opened it and read these words aloud while laughing. “We thought you’d like to meet some of your new family members,” signed by all his buddies, including my grandfather. Mr. Snoutster’s life was saved by a heart valve replacement, a heart valve from a pig! Mr. Snoutster told his friends, “Thanks,” laughed at their joke, and said, “You know, guys, I can’t believe I owe my life to a pig. I guess that old saying about the pig really is true…‘they do use everything but the oink.’

Truly, that is the case, not just in America, but throughout the entire world.

Did you know that pork is the most widely consumed meat protein in the world? (North Carolina Pork Council) According to the United States Department of Agriculture, 42.6 % of the world consumes pork daily (USDA). The main reason for pork being consumed so widely around the world is its broad spectrum of food types. No other animal provides a wider variety of products than the hog (“Pork”).

Because of its versatility and variety of flavors, pork dominates the cuisine of many cultures. The Chinese and other Asian cultures use pork as a source of many dishes. Pork is very famous in European dishes too, especially, German cuisine’s schnitzel. In Austria, the pig welcomes the New Year as the main course and a symbol of good luck (National Pork Board: Pork Check-off Program). Hawaii and other island countries dig a pit and wrap the pig for their cooking celebrations. Mexican food favorites are tamales, carnitas or Indian pozole.

And of course, we Americans consume pork, more than we ever realize. Eighty-six percent of Americans eat some type of pork regularly, at an average of 51 lbs per year (Haley). Pork begins most Americans’ day with breakfast. Did you know that 25% of all pork is eaten at breakfast, with the favorite being bacon (USDA).

Lunch is also a popular time for Americans to eat pork. The America’s favorite in-home lunch is the ham sandwich (USDA). Most other pork dishes are eaten at the evening meal because of its easy preparation and variety of flavors. These meats might include barbecue, ribs, pork tenderloin, pork chops, roast, or ham cooked in a variety of ways (North Carolina Pork Council).

Now some have feared eating pork in the past because of misconceptions about its fat and cholesterol. However, due to efforts of American hog farmers, Pork today is 31% leaner and has 10% less cholesterol and 14% fewer calories than twenty years ago (National Pork Board: The Other White Meat). The amount of cholesterol in a serving of lean pork is no more than in serving of chicken or turkey. Pork also accounts for the highest number of in-home protein eatings (Haley). Protein is a necessity as the building block for the body. Just one serving of pork can supply half the required protein for the day (North Carolina Pork Council). In addition to these factors, this pork meat protein is a valuable source of Zinc, vitamin B 12 and B5, Thiamine and Iron, which are all important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Because pork is so nutritious, versatile, and tasty, it has begun showing up on diet plans. Dr. Wayne Campbell of Purdue University conducted a study of forty-six overweight women (Cunningham). One group of women ate a high protein/reduced calorie diet which included six ounces of lean pork per day. The United States Department of Agriculture counts six cuts of pork as lean with less than 10 grams of fat (USDA). And a 3 oz portion of lean tenderloin is the size of a deck of cards or your fist (Pederson's Natural Farms). After twelve weeks, the Purdue group of women who had eaten the high protein pork diet had not only lost weight, but retained nearly double the lean muscle mass compared to the women who were on the “low-cal” diet.

Next to the meat source the hog makes to society, their second contribution is pharmaceuticals. Forty drugs and pharmaceutical medicines are derived from the basis of hogs due the fact that their digestive and respiratory systems most nearly resemble that of humans (Texas Farm Bureau). Pig insulin is used to treat many diabetes patients whose own bodies no longer secrete the insulin hormone (USDA). Many other hormones and drugs that help enable and prolong human life derive from pigs as well. These include estrogen, cholesterol, thyroxin, glucose, plasma, pepsin, oxytocin, and cortisone (National Pork Board). But medical contributions from pigs don’t stop there.

Since 1971, pig heart valves which are specially selected and treated have been used to replace malfunctioning human heart valves (Texas Farm Bureau). Since that first successful operation, tens of thousands of pig valves have been successfully implanted in humans thus saving many lives (National Pork Board). Pig livers have also been used to sustain lives of patients who are in need of transplants until a human donor liver is available ("Xenotransplantation"). Doctors began to use pig skin in the 1960’s as a xenograft for burn victims, and today it remains the most common xenograft used. Pig skin has a great affinity with human skin, is easily preserved and is readily available for use (Texas Farm Bureau).

In addition to medical uses, by-products of the hog are with us daily. Do you recognize these as pig products when you use them? Antifreeze, crayons, paints brushes, matches, chalk, dog food, fertilizer, and glue (Texas Farm Bureau). Or what about these items from within your home: cement, floor wax, upholstery, insulation, enamel, and plastics. The list is nearly endless, so never underestimate the power of a hog---and I don’t mean the kind that knocks you down or tears through a fence.

Who would have thought when Spanish explorer Hernando Desoto brought 13 pigs to the Florida in 1539 that he would have made such an impact on the future of America (Texas Farm Bureau)? Pigs have not only fed us and kept us healthy, but also helped shaped America as we know it today. Washington’s troops at Valley Forge depended on salt pork for survival (National Pork Board). One of the most recognized streets in America, Wall Street in New York City, was thus named because of the long wall built to control roaming pigs during the Colonial Period (Cunningham). The famous Uncle Sam even got his name from the hog! During the War of 1812, barrels of pork sent to US troops were marked with “US,” so the name Uncle Sam, also known as Sam Wilson New York Pork packer, was quickly given to man who supplied the meat, “enough to feed an army” (Texas Farm Bureau). Even Harry Truman, former United States’ president knew the value of a hog and is known for this famous quote, “No man should be allowed to be president who does not understand hogs” (National Pork Board). And American hog farmers do.

In the mid 1980’s, pork was in a decline, but due to American hog farmers’ persistence in genetic selection and advances in management and nutrition, pork is now leaner and more widely consumed than ever. Pork, the Other White Meat campaign is recognized by 87% of all Americans ("Pork").

In addition, medical advances are being made daily with the latest being the transplant of a landrace pig heart into a baboon which will hopefully in the future lead to xenotransplantation, where a whole human heart could be replaced by that of a pig.

Pork is here to stay. Especially right now during the recession are we reminded of our piggy banks which encourage us to save money (National Pork Board: Pork Check-off Program). Sure, most folks think of that stinky old pig, but little do they know of the contributions the hog really makes to our society! From tamales to pigs’ feet, footballs to crayons, and insulin to heart valves, we do use **everything but oink!**

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