Site selection

Risk assessment

Walk the site before introducing the pigs to map its features and watercourses so you can mitigate pollution issues, protect water, keep pigs safe and comfortable and comply with Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) rules.

A good risk assessment considers:

Farm layout: Think about where pig housing, tracks and gateways sit in relation to the field.

Soil health: Test the soil to determine condition, structure and nutrient levels.

Topography: Check for steep banks, big stones, or areas that get very wet. These areas are more likely to erode, flood or cause pigs to slip or injure themselves.

Proximity to water: Map rivers, drains, and boreholes to plan buffer zones, silt traps and other mitigation measures.

Benefit areas

- Water quality
- Air quality
- Soil quality
- Climate

Practical Tips

- Prioritise free-draining soils and avoid heavy clay or silty soils. Avoid sites located on sloping areas, particularly in high-rainfall regions. Use mapping tools such as ALERT and MAGIC to check for Special Protection Zones and other designated areas and zones.
- Use the Environment Agency mapping tool to check for Drinking Water Safeguard Zones and NVZs.
- Also consider public rights of way, watercourses, access points, roads, and topography.
- Complete field inspections in winter/wet periods to visually identify waterlogging, erosion issues, slopes and access points.
- Plan early with landowners - wait 12 weeks after pigs leave to conduct soil testing.
- Follow the Code of Practice for the welfare of pigs when conducting the risk assessment.

Benefits: Supports compliance with NVZ rules and Farming Rules for Water, ensures safety and accessibility for workers, and supports contingency planning.

Barriers: Time and cost to conduct the assessment and address issues.

Landlord involvement needed: Yes

Pig welfare: Identifies features that could cause injury for pigs, such as large, angular stones and steep slopes.

Ensuring green cover

Establishing grass cover in paddocks before pigs arrive strengthens soil health and structure, reducing erosion and nutrient runoff into nearby watercourses. Plants and roots help retain nitrogen from manure as it breaks down, lowering ammonia and nitrous oxide emissions.

Benefits: Improves soil condition, supports future crop yields, reduces need for additional mitigation measures.

Barriers: Time and cost to establish cover; landlord restrictions may make it difficult to acquire land months in advance.

Landlord involvement needed: Yes

Pig welfare: Provides grazing, cooler ground in summer, and prevents poaching and waterlogging.

Benefit areas

- Water quality
- Air quality
- Soil quality
- Climate

Practical Tips

- Plan 6–12 months ahead for strong, healthy grass coverage.
- Consider quick-growing species mixes (e.g., ryegrass, clover, vetch) if time is limited.
- Maintain cover to avoid bare soil.

Use our simple Excel tool and guidance manual to assess the economic impact of introducing some of these options on your outdoor pig unit.