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Barefoot Farmer

by Jeff Poppen

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Two pigs have been with us since September. The potato patch by the road was full of Johnson grass, so we fenced it off with electric wire and put them there. Basket after basket of rotten squash, sweet potatoes and other vegetables were eagerly devoured. First they were unsure of non-pig chow food, but they soon took to it with gusto. They love to eat and root.

I gave the loading job to my helpers, and it took them most of the day. Escaping up the hill several times, Mark would have shot them, then and there, if he'd had a gun. They finally got loaded, but I had some frustrated helpers, even the next morning.
After they're shot, they are stuck with a knife and bled. Then into the scalding pan, which is kept at between 147 and 150 degrees. It only takes a few minutes of rolling around in there to get the hair loosened. Back out of the scalding pan. Four men immediately scrape all of the hair off, using more hot water as needed.

Next, the hog is strung up and carefully slit down the middle, trying not to open up any intestines. After the insides are cleaned and rinsed, a sawsall separates out the two sides and takes off the backstrap. This makes pork chops and what we call soup meat, which we use in crock pots full of beans.

The hams, shoulder, side meat and ribs are cut off and laid out on a wagon. Now is when we are glad it is cold. The meat cools off overnight and we start to work it up the next day.

Leaf fat is the best for making lard, so we put it off to the side. Three hams and one shoulder are trimmed up neatly, and so are two of the sides. The sides and jowls are salted and will be smoke cured. The hams and shoulders are put in a freezer for three hours, to make slicing them easier.

The other three shoulders and ham, along with the other two sides, will become sausage. We cut the skin off and chop up the meat into cup-sized pieces. This will make about a hundred pounds.

We grew sage again this year. I laid the leaves on a sheet upstairs and let them dry. Then we took the leaves off of the stems and rubbed them. To one quart of rubbed sage I added one quart of salt. I use real salt, a mineral salt from Utah. To this I add one cup of ground red pepper, ground black pepper and ground garlic powder. We dried our own garlic, and we love it.

Ten ounces of this mix was added to 30 pounds of sausage. After a taste test, we added one more ounce of red pepper to each 30 pound batch. Next year the mix will include that, which works out to one and a half cups red pepper, rather than one cup. Some like it even hotter, so we made an extra spicy batch, too.

The hams and shoulder were slice, some for grilling and some for roasts. Everything got wrapped up in freezer paper and is in the freezer, it looks like Long Hungry will be living high on the hog for a while. A big Thank You to the neighbors who helped. We couldn't have done it without you.

About Barefoot Farmer

The Barefoot Farmer (Jeff Poppen) uses his farm (Long Hungry Creek Farm) as an example in demonstrating good farming principles. The landscape and atmosphere of

the 21st century is leaning away from a small farm economy, bucolic scenery, sustainable agriculture and homegrown meals. The health of ourselves and our environment can only be enhanced by a reliance on local small farms for our needs. To learn more about these principle join Jeff Poppen with his weekly column - Barefoot Farmer.

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