

Winter Preparations



Like it or not winter is on its way. At Fowgill we start getting ready for winter in late summer but work really started when the pigs went outdoors in Spring leaving their winter quarters to be cleaned and disinfected ready for the next winter. Inevitably wherever you have outdoor pigs you will find mud. Of course during the summer a pig's life doesn't get much better than being able to wallow in a cool, muddy pool of water on a hot day or being able to dig and root in the ground making holes; holes which quickly fill with water when the weather turns wet. Pig's trotters poach areas around the gate, in the feeding area and at their ark entrance very quickly turning the once dry ground into a quagmire. Deep cold mud is not pleasant for either pigs or their keepers. It can cause terrible strains on joints particularly in gilts/sows that are in pig and weaners/fatteners use their food for keeping warm rather than making pork/bacon. Lost wellies are not uncommon or falling flat on your face in the mud as your pigs clamour round your legs at feeding time. Mud and winter weather are not fun.

After having pigs outside for two North Yorkshire winters on heavy clay ground we soon discovered that our paddocks ended up as quagmires and our pigs were not happy belly deep in cold wet mud (nor were their keepers!) we decided it would be wise to make arrangements to bring our stock in over the worst of the winter weather, roughly clock change to clock change depending on conditions. We are lucky in that we had old farm buildings that could be used. We currently have two old byres and two stables (one of which is used a farrowing house) which we utilise, each has a concrete enclosed yard for exercise and piped in drinkers. The drinkers do freeze in sub-zero conditions but at least there is access to warm water from the nearby house and we know the pigs are happy and snug in deep straw beds. Whilst they're inside weather permitting the paddocks are



Its snow joke out there!!

rotivated and re-seeded and rested, we also clean, disinfect and repair the housing and repair and strengthen fencing. Through regular maintenance some of our wooden arks are now going into their 10th season. We also make temporary paddocks with security fencing (Ever-suffering cast offs again) which when bolted together make sturdy, heavy surrounds approx 40ft square for fatteners and are relatively easy to move around the pasture as each bit gets churned up. The area left behind is re-



seeded. One year we even had to have a pig ark on the patio as we were short of indoor accommodation and all the fields were flooded and iced over. The photos right show how it looked at the start and how it looked by the end of winter!

During summer harvest we make arrangements for a delivery of straw to see us through the winter and of course our harvest of pumpkins are safely stored away and we've put our order in for a couple of tone of fodder beet. We also check the feed merchants delivery cut off dates for Christmas and see if we need to place an order to tide us over the holiday period. Its also useful to keep a surplus of feed just in case bad weather prevents deliveries getting through to you.



It would be interesting to know how other GOS keepers manage winter and it's weather conditions and keep their spirits high. We personally favour a tot of Pig's Nose whiskey to keep out the cold, good thermals and waders!! So please tell us about your experiences and send in your pictures.

Photos & words Mandy Garbutt