

The Harvest of Izzy
By The Happy Berry Bunch



Izzy @ 4 wks

For some years we have grown a pig. You may have gotten to know some of them as we use to allow them to roam the farm during berry picking season so kids could understand where pork chops came from. We stopped because we were worried that DHEC or some other agency would not think it appropriate and in truth they became real friendly, perhaps more friendly than a couple customers wanted. They really liked to be scratched and rubbed and would seek out attention. One young lady experienced stockings being sniffed perhaps a little higher on her legs than she cared for and another having her berry bucket being tipped when she did not pay attention to the request for attention from our pig.

We were taking them for harvest at a local processor but it was very costly and felt like we were not getting are full measure back. For example, this year we processed the head and got 9 pounds of sausage from it. But, back to the story. A friend, Tom Beckman, invited our daughter Zoë and I to go to a hog killing and processing demonstration in west central Georgia at the Old South Farm Museum in Woodland (an annual event there every February). We went and learned a lot and came away convinced that we could do it ourselves. We did feel that we lacked experience. So when Tom, who had been to previous hog killings, said he would help, we jumped at the opportunity. “Yes!” was our reply. Still he had never really done it himself. We needed someone with hands on experience to guide us through it. In talking with our County agent friend, Danny Howard, from Greenville County we learned that he was experienced and he volunteered to help one Saturday when he did not have to work. So, we set the date of April 28, 2012 when we could get everybody coordinated.

We built a small hoist that would carry 300 pounds, a processing table, made a gambrel for hoisting our gilt, Izzy, and dug an angled pit for a 55 gallon barrel to slide Izzy into for scalding, with a wood pallet right next to it for scraping.



Finishing
Scraping

Early in the morning Joaquin our only employee besides family, started a big pot of water over a wood fire to use for scalding. We started about 11 am on the appointed day with good clean kill with a 22 bullet between the eyes. Danny jumped in and slit her throat so would get a good bleed. Just as quick he jumped back pointing out that a kick from Izzy could break a leg. She rolled down the hill and we found how difficult it can be to drag a 300 pound limp pig up a hill! Next year we will have different arrangement (no hill to roll down).

We put about 20 gallons of hot water in the 55 gallon barrel adding cold water from a hose to cool it down to 155 degrees Fahrenheit. We use the three swipe of the hand through the water to check the temperature and then a thermometer. The thermometer was slow and we later realized it was probably too hot. We slid Izzy head first in the barrel left her 2 minutes and flipped her over, then dragged her on to the pallet. Because the water was too hot the scalding set her hair instead of loosening it, what should have taken a half hour to scrape all her hair off took about 2 hours plus. Essentially, we ended up shaving her! We did better with the hindquarter and that half went much quicker.



Tying off the annus

We hoisted her up, tied her anus off to keep her clean. Then we cut her head off. Our next lesson learned was that flies started laying eggs in less than hour or so. We did her too late in the season. It should have much colder and we should have put her head in the cooler immediately. We then split her up the middle and carefully removed the innards, checking for worms and saving her

organs to go in the sausage pot. She was healthy with no worms. We had wormed her 30 days prior but the diagnosis was she never had any.

We then split her with a meat saw right down the middle and swung the hoist around over the table. We cut her in into chops, Boston butts, hams, belly meat for bacon, tenderloins as well as a big bucket of meat for sausage. We learned another lesson, that we had let her get too old, 6 months, and the last 6 to 8 weeks of weight gain had been all lard. Her fatback was at least 2.5 inches thick which we saved for rendering and cooking.



Removing the head

We cured the hams with 9-1-2 (nine pounds of salt, one pound of sugar and 2 oz of saltpeter). Wrapped the hams and bacon, skin on, in paper put them in onion sacks and hung them in the cooler with buckets to catch the water dripping out the hams etc. In 10 days we came back and repeated the cure process using brown sugar this go round. All meat products went in the cooler and we cleaned up. All told about 7 hours. Sunday we



Removing the innards

put the head on to boil for 2.5 hours then deboned the head using ears and all. All told we made 30 lbs of sausage in 4 different recipes with our grinder and Tom's sausage stuffer; there is about 30 lbs of bacon. We will retreat with cure in 7 to 10 more days and freeze after a total of thirty days of curing. All told it took about 4 hours to make the sausage links, patties and few bags for spaghetti. We did not use the feet ...because we were shaving the hair off. It was very hard to clean them so we let them go.



Next year we are thinking we might invite a few guests and charge a small fee to help defray expenses. It is quite an experience and, who knows, some day you might need to know how it is done. The hog killing at the Farm Museum took about 1.5 hours not counting processing and with experience I am sure we can speed ours up.

The End



2012 harvest crew left to right, Zoe Miller, Tom Beckman, Joaquin Paz, Walker Miller, Danny Howard and not shown (taking the picture) Ann Miller