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CURE YOUR OWN PORK

By Harry H. Smith ✓



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CURE YOUR OWN PORK

By HARRY H. SMITH, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

A short time ago I was talking with the manager of a slaughtering house near Fort Collins, and he informed me that during the fall and winter months many farmers brought hogs to the slaughter house and hired him to kill them. Then, after the hogs were dressed and cut up, the farmers would take the meat home. The question occurred to me, why do not the farmers kill their own hogs, save the cost of having it done, and the extra amount of time lost in making the trip to the slaughter house?

Why should anyone follow the practice of selling off all his hogs and buying meat from the local butcher shop at a price which is exceedingly high compared with the price obtained from the live hog? A farmer cannot afford to sell hogs at eight cents a pound and pay from 25 to 35 cents for shoulders, hams, bacon and loins.

At present prices a hog weighing 200 pounds live weight is worth \$16.00. If it dresses 75 per cent, which is about the average, the dressed weight will be 150 pounds, so the dressed hog is worth about eleven cents per pound, excluding the cost of labor, which is not high, as two men can easily kill and dress eight or ten hogs in a half day. Will it not pay you to kill and cure your own meat?

Tools and Equipment.—It is essential to have proper and sufficient equipment for skillful, efficient and rapid work. It need not be expensive nor elaborate. The essential things are: Three or four good **sharp** butcher knives, a fourteen-inch steel, an eighteen- to twenty-four-inch saw, a cleaver, two candlestick scrapers, a hog hook, gambrels, and a thermometer.

In selecting a butcher knife, select one of good material. It does not pay to buy a cheap tool. As to the shape, personally, I like a six-inch skinning knife best for all-round work. In selecting a skinning knife select one which has an even curve and not a shoulder toward the point. I use this kind of a knife for sticking, gutting and cutting up.

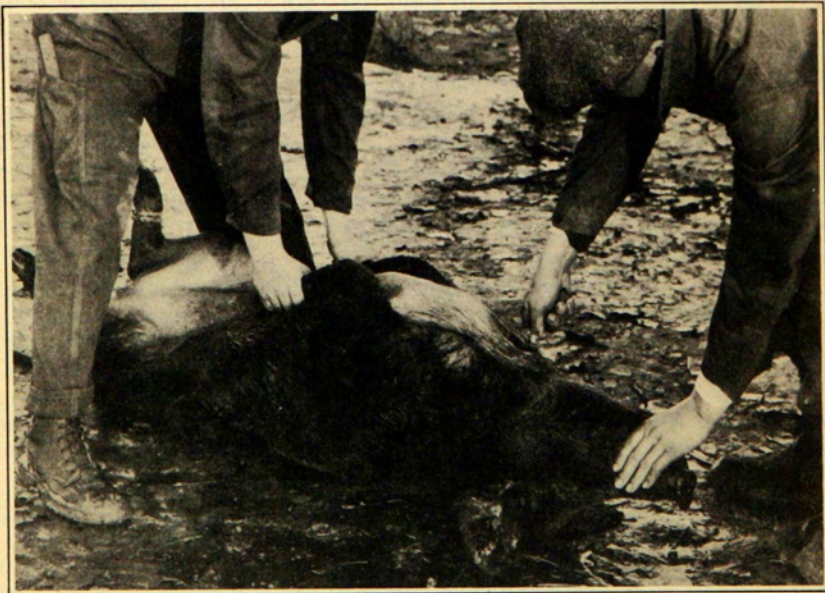
The purpose of a steel is not to sharpen a knife, but to keep it sharp, so buy a steel which is smooth. Use the grind stone to sharpen the knife. Many make the mistake of steeling the knife too much. Steel little and often. A cleaver must have the combined characteristics of strength and weight. The cleaver is used in breaking bones, and should weigh at least three and a half pounds. The gambrels can be easily made on the farm or a short single-tree is an excellent substitute. For the hog hook, a bale hook is good.

Selecting the Animal.—In selecting the animal to kill, health should be given first consideration. Though the hog has been properly fed, and carries a prime finish, the best quality of meat cannot be obtained from a hog which is unhealthy. The keeping quality of the meat is impaired in an unhealthy animal and then there is

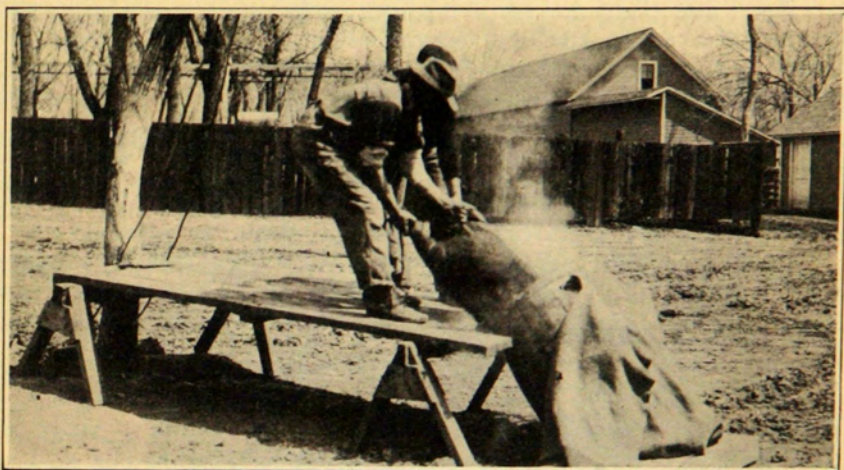
always some danger of the disease being transmitted to the person who eats the meat. A hog in medium condition, and gaining rapidly gives the best quality of meat. A reasonable amount of fat gives juiciness and flavor to the meat. An excess of fat is neither essential nor desirable. An animal weighing from 225 to 275 pounds is the most desirable from the standpoint of weight.

Sticking.—Some kill the hog by shooting it. Shooting is dangerous, and kills the hog too suddenly, stopping the flow of blood. Stunning is often cruel. There is really no excuse for using either method. Sticking is more desirable.

To stick the hog, roll it over on its back, one man straddling the breast of the hog, holding each fore leg up straight, keeping the hog squarely on its back while another places one hand firmly on the hog's chin, forcing it toward the ground, and with the knife in the other hand makes an incision in the throat just in front of the point of the breastbone; insert the knife under the point of the breastbone almost to the handle, then make the point of the knife cut toward the nose of the hog, thus severing the veins and arteries at about the place where they fork. If the veins and arteries are cut at this point a good bleed will be insured. It is not necessary to twist the knife or cut sideways. In fact, twisting the knife or cutting sideways should be avoided, as it only tends to haggle the meat in this section.



Sticking, easy, humane and insures a good bleed



Scalding the hog.

After the animal is stuck it may be allowed to get up and walk around if it so desires, as this will insure a better job of bleeding.

Scalding and Scraping.—The handiest way of heating the water is in a large caldron or kettle over a fire near where the hog is to be scalded. A tank makes a very convenient receptacle in which to scald a hog. However, if none is at hand a barrel is very good, but if the hog is exceptionally large a tank will have to be used. If it is convenient, a block and tackle placed over the scalding vat will eliminate much of the heavy lifting. The water should be maintained at a temperature of 155 to 165 degrees F. If the temperature is much lower the hog will not be scalded, and if much above the hair is liable to be "set"—145 to 150 degrees F. is the ideal temperature, if steam is available so that the temperature can be kept constant. A little lye or wood ashes added to the water, especially if it is hard, will serve to clean the hog and loosen up the scurf. A teaspoonful of lye to thirty gallons of water or a double handful of ashes to the same amount is about right. Stir the water well.

Leave the hog in the water until the hair slips easily from the feet, legs and head, as these are the last places to scald well.

A suitable platform, about four feet wide, on which to do the scraping can be made from four two-inch boards about eight feet long and twelve inches wide, laid on two saw horses about thirty inches high. It will be found convenient to lay the hog crossways of the table so that one person can stand on each side, use the candlestick scraper and begin on the head and legs, working toward the center of the hog. The hair will be found to come off nicer if one scrapes with the lay of the hair rather than against it. In using the scraper tilt it on edge.

Hot water poured over the hog will help loosen any hair which sticks as the carcass cools. After the hair is all removed, throw hot water over the carcass, scrape again using the scraper flat, and applying plenty of weight. This helps greatly to remove any scurf left and cleans the carcass.

Hanging.—Cut the skin for about four inches just below the hocks, loosen both tendons in each leg and insert the gambrel. Then hang the hog so that its nose will be six inches or one foot off the ground. This will make it about the right height to open up.

Opening of Carcass.—Begin by inserting the knife in the opening where the hog was stuck. Put the point of the knife against the

backbone, using this as a fulcrum; lift up on the handle of the knife, splitting the breastbone, being careful not to go up high enough to cut any of the intestines. Then turn the knife over and cut down to the point of the chin, run the knife on each side of the tongue and lift it out. If these operations are performed first one can wash both knife and hands and thus avoid getting blood on the rest of the carcass.



Proper way of splitting the hog, no danger of cutting fingers or intestines.

Cut down until the incision at the breast bone is met. In opening the hog with the knife in this manner, no risk is run of cutting either one's fingers or the intestines. Let the intestines roll out and hang there.

To loosen the rectum, use the penis as a hand hold, keeping it taut. Cut through the pelvic bone with the point of the knife. Cut around the rectum next to the pelvic bones. Strip it down past the kidneys, leaving the fat on the carcass. Hold the intestines on the left arm. With the right hand roll out the paunch, loosen the liver

Starting now at the anus, split down the mid-seam to the pelvic bones. In the case of a barrow free the penis and let it hang. Place the hand with the knife in the abdominal cavity, the handle inside in the hand and the point of the knife out, guarding the heel of the knife with the thumb and forefinger.

and cut it free, and cut off the gullet. Drop the intestines in a tub or on a table. Cut the diaphragm, loosen the artery next to the back bone and pluck out the heart and lungs.

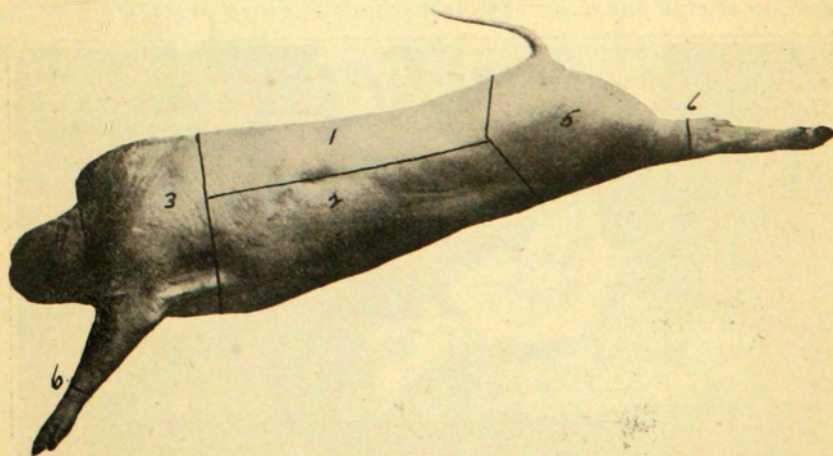
The ribs and head should now be washed with clean, cold water and wiped dry. While the carcass is still warm the leaf fat should be loosened and allowed to hang, this will facilitate cooling and it is also easier to loosen at this time.

The head should next be removed. There are two very common methods of doing this. One is to cut the entire head off by cutting just back of the ears and around to the throat. The other is to leave the jowls on the carcass. Cut down just back of the ears to the puzzle joint, then skin the head out; thus the jowls are left with the carcass. When the carcass is cut up you have two nice small squares of bacon, or "dixie squares" as they are known on the market.

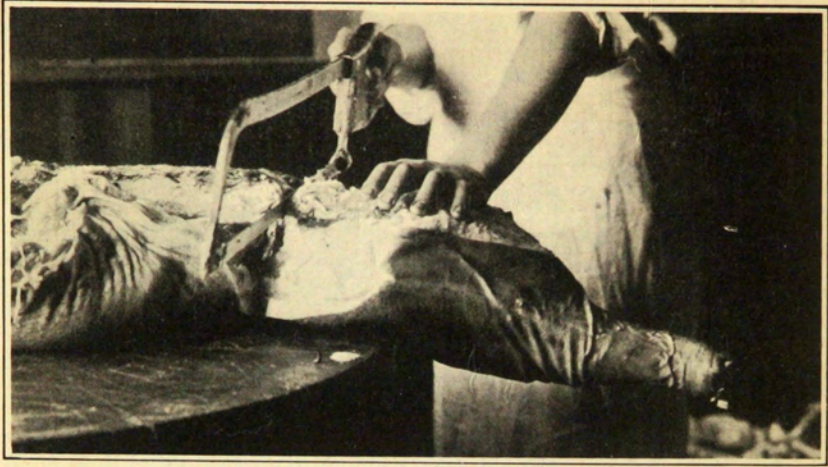
Chilling.—Before the meat is handled it should be thoroughly chilled. This prevents bone sour and spoiling. When unchilled meat is cut up and salted its looks and keeping qualities are greatly impaired. To facilitate cooling split the carcass down the center of the backbone with the saw, and hang in a place where the temperature is at least down to 36 degrees F., but it is not good for the meat to freeze as this also impairs its keeping qualities.

Cutting.—Remove the shoulder by cutting between the third and fourth ribs. If the shoulder is to be cured for summer use, trim so as to leave it as large as possible. The neck bones and ribs, which are found in the shoulder, should be removed as spare as possible.

Then cut off the jowl, making the cut parallel with the other



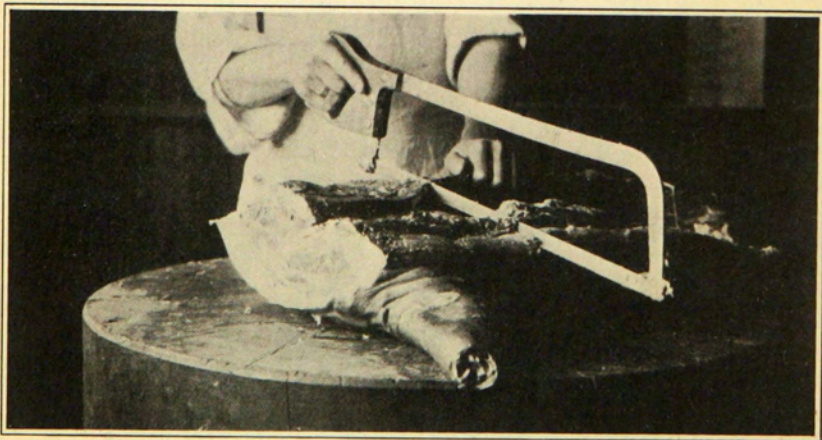
1. Loin. 2. Side and spare ribs. 3. Shoulder. 4. Jowl or "Dixie Square". 5. Ham. 6. Cut off feet.



Make cut at front of sacral arch and at right angles to the hind leg.

side of the shoulder. It is now trimmed up by cutting off the rough edges over the arm at the neck and in the fore flank of the shoulder. Remove as much of the fat as is possible at the top of the shoulder without uncovering the lean, making a piece of meat which is more or less square and shapely. After removing all the bloody spots, which are sometimes found at the point where the vein enters the shoulder, and removing the shank at the knee, the shoulder is ready for curing.

The ham is cut off just behind the rise in the pelvic arch, and



Cut off shoulder between third and fourth ribs.



Taking loin from side meat. Cut from arch in ribs to end of small tenderloin muscle at the ham end.

at right angles to the hind leg. The ordinary ham is trimmed by facing, which means removing the fat from the under part. The sacral bone is usually removed, as well as the tip end of the round bone which runs from the ham to the backbone. The aim is to leave the piece as smooth, full on top and as free as possible from any jagged ends. The foot is usually removed by cutting off at the hock, at least this is the packer's method. The farmer usually cuts it off above the hock to avoid having a stub left when the ham is cut up.

In removing the loin, cut parallel with the backbone along the tenderloin muscle. Remove the fat back from the loin, leaving from a quarter to one-half inch of fat on the loin; use the fat back for lard. The loin can be cut up into roasts or sliced up for pork chops.

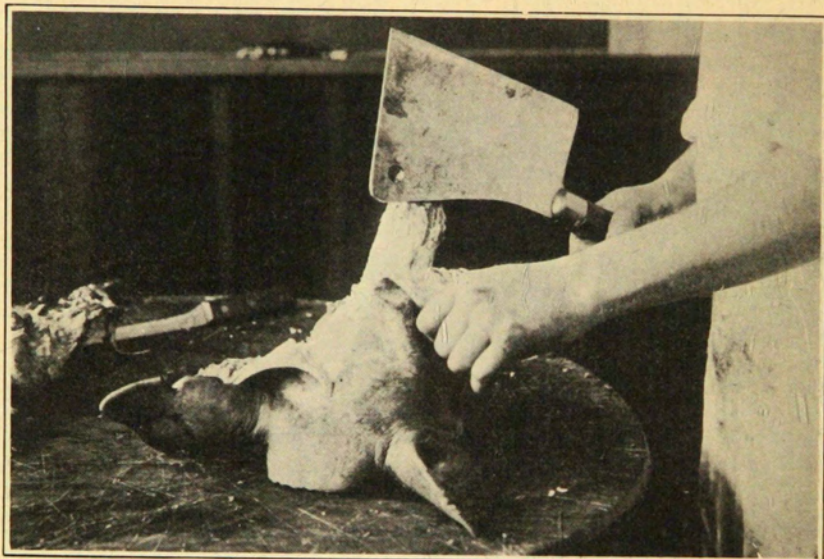
Remove the ribs by cutting under them with a knife. Remove as spare as possible. Cut the ribs with a cleaver into suitable lengths for cooking.

Flatten the bacon piece out with the cleaver and trim so that the edges are straight. Take a strip off the underside wide enough to remove the mammary system.

Use all trimmings for lard or sausage.

To clean the head, split it through the middle with the saw. Remove the brains with a knife. Cut along each side of the lower jaw and lift it out. Skin the meat off the bone back as far as the teeth and cut the lower jaw with all the teeth off with the cleaver.

Remove the eyes with a sharp knife, also remove the inside of



Cleaning head, remove eyes with small knife, take off under jaw by cutting muscles on each side. Remove meat from snout by skinning it off with cleaver, cut out bone with cleaver. Be sure to get out all the teeth.

the ears. Skin the meat back off of the snout, remove the bone with the cleaver, being sure to get all the teeth, as they are quite often diseased. The head, then, along with the feet, can be pickled or made into head cheese.

Curing.—Standard recipes for curing 100 pounds of meat are:

Plain salt pork—10 lbs. of salt, 4 oz. of saltpeter to four gallons of water.

Sugar cured pork—10 lbs. of salt, 4 oz. of saltpeter, 4 lbs. of sugar, 4 gal. of water. Pulverize the saltpeter thoroughly. Boil and remove the scum. If a stone jar is available to pack the meat in, nothing else is better. If a jar is not available use a clean hardwood barrel.

Pack the meat in, putting down the hams and shoulders first, fitting them in as closely as possible. Pack all the pieces with skin side down, except the last piece of bacon, which should be put on top with the skin side up. After the pickle is entirely cold, pour in, letting it run down between the container and the meat. Do not pour right down on top of the meat. Weight down with a clean rock or a heavy stick.

The length of time required for curing depends on the size of the piece. Bacon should stay in the cure about two and one-half days to the pound, hams and shoulders about four days to the pound.

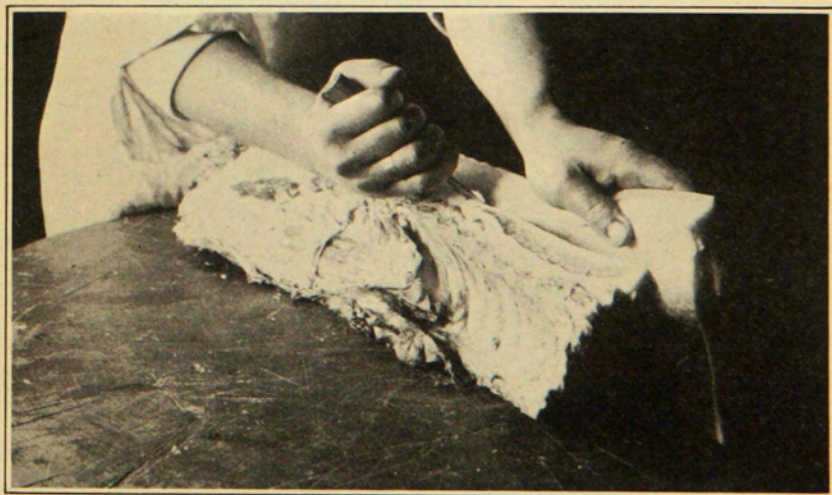
Over-hauling and repacking on the fifth and fifteenth days, insures even and more rapid curing. The same brine is used. The pickle should be very carefully watched for souring or ropiness. At the first sign of spoiling, the meat should be removed, the receptacle scalded and new brine made. Thirty-five to thirty-six degrees F. is the ideal temperature at which to keep the pickle. Higher temperatures promote spoiling. In lower temperatures the curing will not be complete. When the curing is complete the meat should be removed, strung and thoroughly washed, and hung up to dry for twelve to fourteen hours, and placed in the smoke house.

Smoking.—Of all the woods used for smoking, hickory seems to be the most in favor, but any of the hardwoods are good, which are free from resin or oils. Maple and oak, next to hickory are best. Cottonwood and aspen are good, or aspen and a little willow are good. Pine and any of the resinous woods, of course, should be avoided. Juniper bush is supposed to give flavor to the meat, but this is probably only notional.

The fire should be a very slow one, otherwise there will be too much heat generated and the meat would be partially cooked.

The length of time to smoke depends upon the nature and size of the meat. It should be smoked long enough to give it a good, mild, straw color. Thirty hours should be none too long.

The meat should then be hung in a cool place where there is a good circulation of air.



Taking off the fat back.