

**GOING  
WHOLE  
HOG**

**A GUIDE FOR FOODSERVICE CHEFS AND COOKS**

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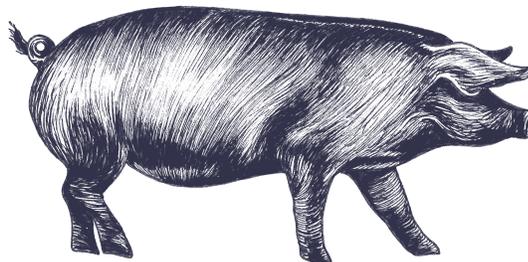


# INTRODUCTION: BEYOND BACON

No doubt about it, people love their bacon. But pork belly, the source of all that flavorful bacon-y goodness, comes wrapped in a whole hog standing on four legs. If we want to build a thriving local food system, we need to go beyond bacon.

The Pacific Northwest is home to relatively few pigs. The commercial hog industry in the U.S. co-evolved with its primary source of commercial feed, corn and soybeans, and therefore most large hog operations are located in the midwest and southeast. That's lucky in a way — industrial operations at commodity scale often generate significant waste and environmental degradation, not to mention make use of antibiotics (to keep animals healthy in high numbers in confined spaces), and practices (such as tail-docking and gestation crates for sows) deemed inhumane by animal welfare organizations.

But there is good news for us PNW pork-lovers. Pigs are omnivores — they'll happily eat and grow on a Pacific Northwest diet, and can thrive in pasture-based systems in our climate. They can even root out invasive weeds and help rebuild soil health, drawing carbon out of the atmosphere in integrated



farming systems. Responsibly raised pigs could also be a lucrative market for small and midsize farmers and ranchers, bringing cash to rural communities.

Research conducted by Ecotrust in 2016 suggests that pork has the potential to be an economically viable regional market at scale in the northwest, meaning delicious, affordable, humanely-raised, climate-smart, local bacon could soon be at our fingertips!

If so, it will be thanks to the culinary creativity of forward-looking, community-minded, perhaps slightly maverick chefs, who jump all the hurdles to buy pork from small and mid-sized regional pig farmers now. Those chefs (you?) are using their purchasing dollars and culinary talent to build a food system that is equitable, restorative, prosperous and delicious.

The catch? We'll have to use the whole hog. No farmer yet has figured out a way to just grow bacon.

This guide describes one creative approach: partnering with a local pig farmer and meat distributor to buy whole hogs direct from the farm, but processed into parts that foodservice chefs and cooks can manage without having to learn whole hog butchery.

## USING THIS GUIDE: ARE YOU READY TO GO WHOLE HOG?

If you're not already operating a scratch kitchen, going whole hog likely won't happen overnight. You'll need to invest in equipment, tools, staff skills and enthusiasm, budgets, and menus that all synchronize to support this holistic method of purchasing. Even in a well-equipped scratch kitchen, implementing this new workflow and way of thinking may take time. It's worth the persistence! Don't forget to bring your staff, administration and diners along—they can help smooth the path and help overcome hurdles.

Use this guide to map your route and reduce guesswork. You'll find practical information for tools and training, costing and budgeting, menu-planning, kitchen workflows, and getting administrative support for purchasing farm-direct whole hogs, so you can make every delicious piece count.

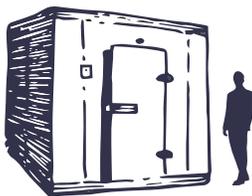


**SECTION 1**

# **TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT**

# THE RIGHT TOOLS CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

You probably already have many of the tools and equipment listed below, and if not, use this list as a roadmap to building whole hog readiness. The price ranges are ballparks and designed help kick-off investment conversations with management partners.



## **Cooler**

*(\$3,000 - \$11,000)*

Got space? If your walk-in cooler is already pushing maximum daily capacity, you may struggle to have the space necessary to accommodate a whole hog weekly workflow. If your operation is keen on local food however, pitching management on expanded cold storage is worth the effort.



## **Freezer**

*(\$5,000 - \$12,000)*

Freezers are the secret weapons of local food superheroes. Especially for operations keen to stockpile certain cuts for catering or specials, ample frozen storage is essential.



### **Commercial work tables**

*(\$100 - \$3,000)*

While these are fairly common in most kitchens, processing larger, whole hog cuts into entree ready preparations takes elbow-room. A stable, open workspace is important for safety and productivity.



### **Deboning knives...**

*(\$5 - \$50)*

In a whole hog model, many cuts come bone-in, and a good deboning knife is a real timesaver.



### **... and the skills to use them**

*(\$150 - \$1,000)*

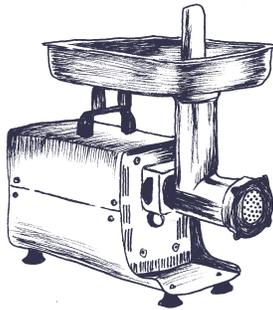
Supplemental knife skills training is a staff development investment that can pay dividends. Check local community colleges, culinary schools or online courses for affordable options, or pair up less experienced staff with meat-cutting mentors.



### **Stock pots**

*(\$15 - \$600)*

Stock pots are standard issue for broths and soups, and essential to whole hog utilization when bones and trim come into play. Ramen, anyone?



### **Meat grinder**

*(\$300 - \$3,000)*

If you want to build a kitchen of meat ninjas, a grinder is helpful. Grind up pork trim to add flavor to beef dishes like spaghetti sauce or meatloaf, or make your own pork breakfast sausage (just add thyme and honey!). A grinder is not absolutely necessary, but comes in handy in scratch kitchens.



### **Tilt skillet**

*(\$8,500 - \$15,000)*

Cook up 75 lbs of ground meat or make nearly 30 gallons of soup at once! Especially useful for braising in the whole hog model, tilt skillets make a huge difference in a high volume kitchen. Capacities range from 10 to 40 gallons, so you can make the

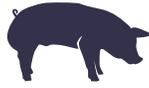
investment that matches your scale (or start small and trade up as volume and the need for efficiency grows).



### **Smoker**

*(\$2,000 - \$5,000)*

Not necessary, but nice to have! A smoker can broaden variety and interest on your menu, increase engagement with diners, and provide creative stimulation for cooks. You can go whole hog without one, but if you've got one, you're going to have fun.



**SECTION 2**

# **DOING THE MATH**

# MAKE IT PENCIL

Pork raised on small or mid-sized farms in the Northwest — without routine antibiotics and with room to roam outside — is going to cost more (and taste better!) than commodity pork from industrial hog operations. To make it pencil for pork (and all local, pasture-based meats), you'll likely want to cost out your whole menu and manage to a total, rather than simply assessing prices directly between local/high-welfare and commodity product, as if that were an apples-to-apples comparison.

## **Less meat better meat**

One key strategy for making the math work is to shift toward more plant-based menu items and shift meat away from center-plate. Diners may be less resistant than you'd expect! Many culturally-specific cuisines trending in popularity use little meat. Southeast Asian, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and West African cuisines, for example, all use smaller portions of meat and lots more veggies and greens. Less meat on the menu means you'll be able to pay a little more for it and hold your total costs steady.

## **Whole animal purchasing**

The other key strategy is to buy the whole animal and use it all. You'll pay a consistent price per pound across the whole hog, which means less on a per pound basis for traditionally more expensive cuts, slightly more for traditionally cheaper

cuts, and lots of “bonus” items (like the head, bones, and trim) along for the ride.

Beyond product price, going whole hog will also affect your labor costs and kitchen workflow, which is important to factor in and plan for. Unlike most traditional foodservice cuts sold by the case, the whole hog program delivers cuts broken down into subprimals, bone-in. The legs can be large and heavy, relative to traditional cuts, and require decent knife skills for deboning (or braising until the meat falls off!).

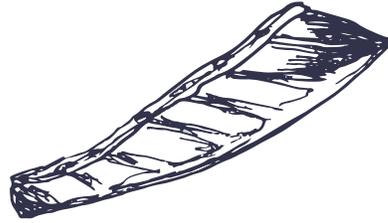
The following table illustrates the number, type, and average weight of cuts you are likely to receive as a percentage of a 170 lb hanging weight\* hog. You can expect to receive six to eight boxes of meat per animal, depending on its actual size. The fully loaded price per pound for the whole hog (including processing and delivery) averages out at \$2.70/lb.

Table 1: Whole hog model cost per cut based on approximate percentage of hanging weight

| CUTS (NO. FOR EACH HOG)                     | APPROX % OF TOTAL WEIGHT | APPROX WEIGHT IN LBS (BASED ON 170LB HOG) | COST PER CUT BASED ON WHOLE HOG PRICING (\$2.20 / LB) |
|---|--------------------------|---|---|
| <b>A)</b> Legs (2, bone in)                 | 25%                      | 43  | \$94  |
| <b>B)</b> Belly (2)                         | 20%                      | 34  | \$75  |
| <b>C)</b> Ribs (2 large, 2 small)           | 11%                      | 19  | \$41  |
| <b>D)</b> Shoulders (2)                     | 12%                      | 20  | \$45  |
| <b>E)</b> Loin (2)                          | 18%                      | 31  | \$67  |
| <b>F)</b> Head                              | 5%                       | 9   | \$19  |
| <b>G)</b> Trim (bones / fat)                | 9%                       | 15  | \$34  |
| <b>COST OF HOG BY WEIGHT X \$2.20/LB</b>    |                          |   | <b>\$375</b>  |
| <b>PROCESSING / DELIVERY FEE (\$.50/LB)</b> |                          |   | <b>\$85</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL TO BUYER</b>                       |                          |   | <b>\$460</b>  |



**A) LEGS**



**E) LOIN**



**B) BELLY**



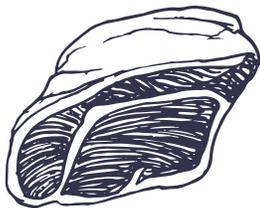
**F) HEAD**



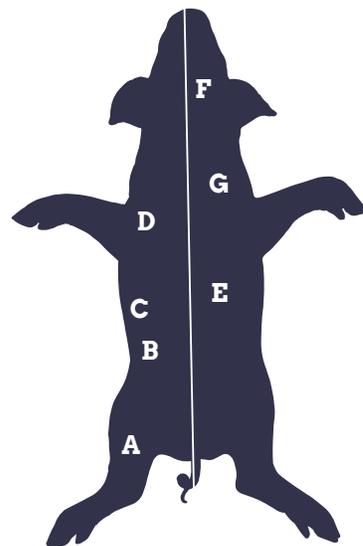
**C) RIBS**



**G) TRIM**



**D) SHOULDERS**

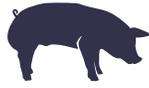


### **Avoiding food waste: How much for how many?**

Hogs are fairly large animals, with typical hanging weights ranging from 150 to 170 lbs or more. A single pig can feed 200 to 400 people depending on serving size and diners' dietary preferences. So, even if you're serving more than 2,000 meals per day, but have a lot of vegetarians or non-pork eaters, one hog per week may be ideal. If you've got a freezer, stockpiling loins for catering or specials can also help manage volume. We recommend testing recipes and workflow over a few weeks to land on the best system for efficient utilization and happy cooks.

### **Good to the bone: Margins on more than meat**

Traditional purchasing typically undervalues bones, fat, and trim, but of course all of these are absolutely essential to the health of the pig in life, and the producer certainly can't bring an animal to market without them. Devising creative ways to use these products respects the animal and the farmer, delivers real benefit in terms of flavor, and offers a creative, culinary challenge to chefs and cooks. While those benefits may not be captured in line-items in your budget, watch for improved performance in metrics such as customer satisfaction, employee engagement and pride, catering sales, even local PR and invitations to tell your story on social media or at events.



**SECTION 3**

# **MENU PLANNING**

# MOVING PRODUCT THROUGH YOUR KITCHEN

One of the keys to making a whole hog program work is to make sure the product — all of it — is moving efficiently from walk-in to production to plate. Too much emphasis on meat dishes could leave a surplus of bones and trim (which can come in handy!), but too much stockpiling can put a freeze on margin.

Front-loading prep work, like de-boning legs, soon after delivery will get heavy lifting out of the way early and make for a smooth flow to the week. Schedule skilled staff for that day and get meat prepped at its freshest. With a small team or tight space, prep tasks can be spread across the week, but make sure there's a plan so that nothing goes to waste.

## **Sample menu and kitchen workflow**

The following system shows how moving a single whole hog through an institutional kitchen setting might look, with each entrée serving from 100 to 150 people.

## DAY 1

Delivery day (6-8 boxes depending on size of pig)

**PREP:**

Remove cuts from boxes and divide for use:

- Season ribs, reserve in cooler
- Brine pork tenderloins for roasting or smoking, reserve in cooler
- Debone legs
- Break down and debone pork shoulders
- Reserve bones from legs, shoulders, and neck, along with head, in freezer
- Reserve any trim and grind or include with bones and head
- Keep bellies in cryovac wrap in cooler until ready to use

## DAY 2

**PREP:**

Grind ~12 lbs

Marinate pork leg meat for carnitas, divide into three portions

**COOK:**

Smoke ribs 6-8 hours, reserve in cooler  
Cook ground pork in chili

**SERVE:**

*Lunch: Pork chili*

## DAY 3

**COOK:**

Braise 1 portion of leg meat for carnitas  
Braise pork ribs

**SERVE:**

*Lunch: Carnitas*  
*Dinner: Ribs*

## DAY 4

**PREP:**

Grind ~12 lbs

**COOK:**

Cook ground pork in spaghetti sauce  
Roast brined pork loin

**SERVE:**

*Lunch:* Spaghetti bologese  
*Dinner:* Roasted pork loin or chops

## DAY 5

**PREP:**

Remove all bones, head and trim from freezer and transfer to cooler

Prep belly for Porchetta, reserve in cooler

**COOK:**

Braise 1 portion of leg meat for carnitas  
Smoke 1 pork shoulder

**SERVE:**

*Lunch:* Carnitas  
*Dinner:* Smoked pork shoulder

## DAY 6

**COOK:**

Place bones and head in stock pot with mirepoix, boil, then set to simmer for 24 hrs.

Cook Porchetta

**SERVE:**

*Dinner:* Porchetta

## DAY 7

**COOK:**

Braise 1 portion of leg meat for carnitas

Remove bones and head from stock pot, save broth (bones / scrap from a single pig should make about 5 gal. of broth when reduced)

**SERVE:**

*Lunch:* Carnitas  
*Dinner:* Ramen bar

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## **Shelf life**

In this model, most of the cuts, with the exception of the vacuum sealed belly, come fresh, boxed together without any additional wrapping, which means more air contact and a reduced shelf life. A good rule of thumb is to put anything you'll use in the next seven days in the cooler and freeze the rest. And, keep in mind, even bones go bad: If you're not going to use them right away, best practice is to put a freeze on these tasty tidbits.

## **Bring on the bacon**

Another option for using the pork belly is to make in-house bacon. This is typically a month-long process and requires space for the bacon to cure. To make bacon, let the bellies rest with a mix of salt, sugar, and spices for seven to 10 days, rinse, smoke, then hang for a month. About five weeks after each delivery of pork belly, you'll have delicious in-house bacon for your diners.

## **Reserving ribs**

Ribs are a popular item, but even in an operation that doesn't go through very much pork, a single pig likely won't have enough ribs for an entrée that serves upwards of 100 to 150 people. Reserving popular but limited cuts and staggering them week to week is one option to avoid coming up short. Another could be to run with a limited supply each week – first come, first served!



**SECTION 4**

# **ENGAGING ADMINISTRATION**

# SHARING SUCCESS

There is a lot more to going whole hog than cooking. This type of holistic system can have implications for staff professional development and training, labor costs, overall budget management, and potentially even community engagement, diner experience, and client or diner satisfaction. Engaging administrators early and positioning the program to meet management's goals can ensure it's a win-win.

## **Zero waste**

Is your team pursuing food waste reduction strategies in-house and/or upstream? A whole hog model is consistent with important climate strategies like zero waste, imperfect produce, plant-based diets, water conservation and soil stewardship.

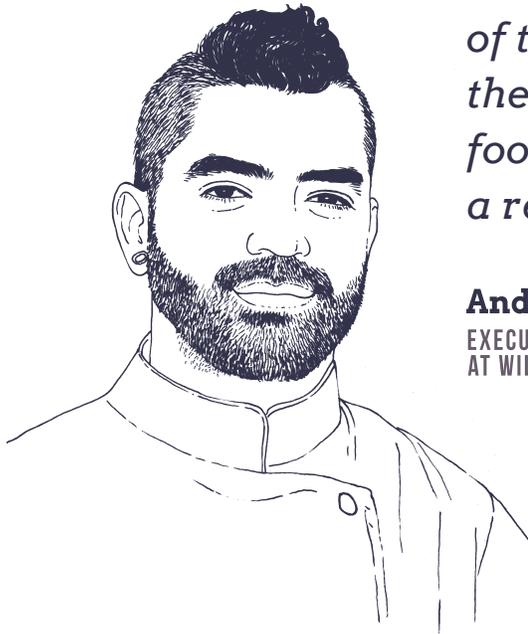
## **Show me the money**

Making the financial case for whole hog purchasing should be a task made easier using the guidelines and calculations from this guide. If transitioning to scratch cooking in general is a new goal for your team, there will be a bigger upfront investment in equipment and staff training. The good news is that, with the infrastructure in place, quality, flavor, nutrition profile and stakeholder engagement will all be on the rise. This takes partnership, long-term planning, and perseverance, but yields benefits for the operation's entire community.

## **If diners are happy, I'm happy**

If diner satisfaction drives your operation, going whole hog should be an easy proposition. Utilizing the whole animal means that your diners will experience flavor in a whole new way (older diners often say pork grown in local, regenerative, smaller scale operations tastes like they remember pork from their childhoods), and your team's culinary creativity will shine. Keep stakeholders engaged by hosting tastings, sharing customer testimonials, and circulating menus.

*"I buy whole animals raised really well, and have trained my staff to break them down. It's by far the best pricing, and we get to use every part of the animal, including the bones and fat. Our food tastes darn good as a result!"*



**Andre Uribe**

EXECUTIVE CHEF, BON APPETIT  
AT WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY



**SECTION 5**

**GO WHOLE HOG!**

The system described here is modeled on a partnership between Pure Country Pork in Ephrata, Washington, and its USDA processor, plus the Portland branch of regional distributor Corfini Gourmet, and creative chefs at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, and Reed College, in Portland. If you're in the Pacific Northwest, lucky you! Contact Corfini Gourmet ([corfinigourmet.com](http://corfinigourmet.com)) or the NW Food Buyers' Alliance ([www.food-hub.org/nwfb](http://www.food-hub.org/nwfb)) to join the existing partnership.

If you want to go whole hog outside Oregon or Washington, use this guide to develop your own regional partnership. Keep in mind that all parties – farmer, processor, distributor, and chef – will need to collaborate on pricing, processing, and distribution to ensure a mutually beneficial partnership. It's worth it!

### **About the NW Food Buyers' Alliance**

The NW Food Buyers' Alliance is a peer-to-peer network of foodservice directors and chefs in the Pacific Northwest who are committed to sourcing locally in order to help build thriving local economies, vibrant urban and rural communities, and equitable access to good food. Learn more at [www.food-hub.org/nwfba](http://www.food-hub.org/nwfba) or send us an email at [NWFBA@food-hub.org](mailto:NWFBA@food-hub.org).

The Alliance is coordinated and supported by a coalition of organizations, including Ecotrust, Health Care Without Harm, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Oregon Tilth. Donations from generous individuals, foundations, and companies fund our projects.

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**NOTES:**

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