Origins

The pig is an animal found in almost all the regions of Africa. Despite the cultural and religious influences in parts of the continent that limit pork production and consumption, pig farming is generally growing across West, East, Central and Southern Africa. Although the growth of pig farming in Africa is less compared with other parts of the world, some farmers are enjoying the benefits of this enterprise.

Description

The Local African Pig originates from the Iberian and is roughly the same in all African countries where it exists. The Local African Pig is known under many names including: Kolbroek (in South Africa) - Somo (in Mali), Bakosi (Gabon) - West African Dwarf pig (Nigeria) - Ashanti Dwarf pig (Ghana) Bush pig (Togo) - Mukota pigs or Zimbabwe Mukota pigs (in Zimbabwe). The descriptions available in the literature are often very general. The size is small, with a short forehead, a straight tail and an elongated snout, with medium, semi-erect, swept-back small ears carried horizontally or slightly erect. The body, rather narrow, is carried by relatively long legs. The croup is slightly inclined and relatively muscular hams. The skin is often dark, sometimes pie, gray, red, rarely white. The coat is variable; sometimes formed long, coarse hairs, which almost hide the skin, with a strip of longer hair along the spine. The Local African Pigs are usually of modest size with adults reaching 100 kg maximum weight but rarely weigh more than 60 kg at 12 months.
of age, even under the best rearing conditions. The pigs are sexually early maturing. Females may show first oestrus as early as three months of age. The Local African Pig can tolerate food scarcity, is heat tolerant and prolific. The Local African Pig population was estimated in 2001 at 19 million head. In Africa, Nigeria, has the largest pig population (4,855,000), followed by Uganda (1.55 million), South Africa (1.54 million), Cameroon (1.35 million) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (1 million).

Management and husbandry

Compared with the extensive bibliography for cattle, sheep and goats, there are relatively few descriptions of smallholder pig production systems. In Africa, a significant number of pigs are kept in semi-intensive production systems, usually in peri-urban areas. However, the majority of pigs are still kept in villages under traditional management. Pig breeding is mostly practiced in suburban and rural areas. Pig production systems can be divided into two main categories; herding/scavenging systems where the pig finds most of its own food, and intensive systems where the majority of the food consists of household scraps or specially grown food.

Breed types

The pigs of sub-Saharan Africa are conventionally divided into two major types: the so-called “indigenous” pig and the introduced exotic breeds. The exotic pigs in Africa that arrived in the colonial period came originally from Europe, America and the Far East. Almost all modern piggeries use exclusively exotics, especially Large White, Landrace, Duroc and Hampshire.

Selection and crossbreeding Programmes

Two approaches are possible to cause genetic improvement: new genes can be introduced using purebred or crossbred animals. In the traditional environment, breeding needs to consider the two main constraints that are food and health, so as not to move towards animals with high potential but unsuitable for the farming system practiced.

Very few observations were recorded on the Local African Pig, which is bred according to traditional standards or improved conditions. Probably, the few studies done on Local African Pig have sufficiently discredited these local breeds. In many African countries, Local African Pigs have not been characterized and are still listed and designated under “indigenous”, “local” or “unimproved” breeds. This situation is further complicated in some areas due to crosses with imported exotic strains. A successful restocking programme should consider urgently involving farmers in identifying the pig breeds best suited to their resource limited environments. In order to understand the pig breeding practices, there is need to establish
the selection criteria used by farmers. The productive traits like litter size and mortality rates are also important for measuring efficiency of breeding practices.

Few projects, in Africa have, been conducted, to improve the pig breeds and to increase the farmers’ incomes. Examples are the Programs for food security, in Burkina Faso, that seek to support the intensification of artisanal systems through improved genetics and diet, control of farming techniques and disease control; in Ghana, the development of the dwarf Ashanti pig breed aims at improving the growth rate, productivity, litter size at birth and weaning. In Côte d’Ivoire, the pig breeding program initiated was devastated by the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak that occurred in 1996. Research to evaluate the Zimbabwean indigenous pig has been sporadic and inadequate. Consequently, the Zimbabwean indigenous pig has not been sufficiently characterized.

In a number of countries in West Africa (Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroon, etc.), animals called “improved” represent between 10 to 20% of the pig population. These animals, rarely purebreds, are the product of multiple crossings between local breeds and exotic breeds, according to the successive imports and supplies of exotic parents. In Nigeria, if the Large White breed predominates, there are also animals like the Hampshire, Landrace, Duroc, and Large Black. In Côte d’Ivoire, the Craonnais boars, Yorkshire, Large White, Landrace and Pietrain were introduced. In Cameroon, records of imports mention the Berkshire, Pietrain, Landrace and the Large White. These imports are longstanding and there is often a deterioration explained by inbreeding and a substantial dilution of exotic genes into the local breeds. However, most of the time, the introduction of improved boars has had little influence on the local breed. In Benin, the low interest of ‘improved’ animals for farmers is due to the high acquisition and their rearing costs. In the Sudano-Sahelian zone, pig is generally less present due to the importance of Islam in these regions. However the few regions where there is ethnic majority, pig breeds proved favorable for improving the local breed. The best known example is the “Porc de Korhogo” (Côte d’Ivoire), where Craonnais boars were crossed with local females, the best descendants of this cross were subsequently mated with Yorkshire boars, and the stabilization gave birth to the “Korhogo” strain. Large White imports date back from 1934 and the current population is around 48,000 heads. The “Porc de Korhogo” has enjoyed a resounding success, thanks to its good performance, and has been widely exported to neighboring countries (Burkina Faso, Guinea, etc). In other nearby areas, there are also significantly larger pig formats found compared to the ones found on the coast, who benefited from exotic blood supply: for example, in Togo the “porc de Dapaong” and in Benin the “pork de Matéri”. In the highlands of Cameroon (1400 m), a particular strain, the “porc de Bakwedi” got stabilized after interbreeding with local female boars Berkshire.

The need for preserving local pig breeds
The history of pigs in Africa is blurred by the circumstance that very large numbers of European pig breeds were brought to all parts of the continent with European contact, both as part of undocumented subsistence strategies and in conjunction with missionary and colonial agricultural development projects. The genetic heritage of today’s Local African Pigs populations is thus extremely mixed. Local breeds of pigs are reservoirs of genes and sources of heterosis. These breeds are constantly threatened by genetic erosion, meaning, and more or less progressive loss of genetic diversity. These phenomena are actually related to the implementation of indiscriminate crossbreeding programs, which influence the structure and dynamics of populations and contribute to increase the production gap between breeds that benefit from support for efficient crossbreeding programs, and those whose interest appears to be more local. It is imperative to draw attention to the disappearance of the Local African Pigs breeds, which means the loss of part of the gene pool. The diverse roles of indigenous pigs entail that there is need for conservation of livestock diversity to support sustainable agricultural development.
Local Tswana Pig breeds at the Sebele Kraal at Department of Agricultural Research in Gaborone, Botswana

References


