

# Rolling Stone

## Boss Hog—Part 1

*America's top pork producer churns out a sea of waste that has destroyed rivers, killed millions of fish and generated one of the largest fines in EPA history. Welcome to the dark side of the other white meat.*

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Dec. 14, 2006

**S**mithfield Foods, the largest and most profitable pork processor in the world, killed 27 million hogs last year. Hogs produce three times more excrement than human beings do. The 500,000 pigs at a single Smithfield farm generate more fecal matter each year than the 1.5 million inhabitants of Manhattan. The best estimates put Smithfield's total waste discharge at 26 million tons a year. That would fill four Yankee Stadiums.

Smithfield's pigs live by the hundreds or thousands in warehouse-like barns, in rows of wall-to-wall pens. Sows are artificially inseminated and fed and delivered of their piglets in cages so small they cannot turn around. Forty fully grown 250-pound male hogs often occupy a pen the size of a tiny apartment. They trample each other to death. There is no sunlight, straw, fresh air or earth. The floors are slatted to allow excrement to fall into a catchment pit under the pens.

The temperature inside hog houses is often hotter than ninety degrees. The air, saturated almost to the point of precipitation with gases from feces and chemicals, can be lethal to the pigs. Enormous exhaust fans run twenty-four hours a day. The ventilation systems function like the ventilators of terminal patients: If they break down for any length of time, pigs start dying.

From Smithfield's point of view, the problem with this lifestyle is immunological. Taken

together, the immobility, poisonous air and terror of confinement badly damage the pigs' immune systems. They become susceptible to infection, and in such dense quarters microbes or parasites or fungi, once established in one pig, will rush spritelike through the whole population.

Accordingly, factory pigs are infused with a huge range of antibiotics and vaccines, and are doused with insecticides. Without these compounds—oxytetracycline, draxxin, cef-tiofur, tiamulin—diseases would likely kill them. Thus factory-farm pigs remain in a state of dying until they're slaughtered. When a pig nearly ready to be slaughtered grows ill, workers sometimes shoot it up with

as many drugs as necessary to get it to the slaughterhouse under its own power. As long as the pig remains ambulatory, it can be legally killed and sold as meat.

The drugs Smithfield administers to its pigs, of course, exit its hog houses in pig feces. Industrial pig waste also contains a host of other toxic substances: ammonia, methane, hydrogen sulfide, carbon monoxide, cyanide, phosphorous, nitrates and heavy metals. In addition, the waste nurses more than 100 microbial pathogens that can cause illness in humans, including salmonella, cryptosporidium, streptococci and girardia. Each gram of hog feces can contain as much as 100 million fecal coliform bacteria.

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