

KuneKunes for Pork?

By Kathy Petersen, Virginia KuneKunes

KuneKunes are continuing to grow in homesteads and farms across the country. They are gaining in popularity and quickly becoming an alternative to commercial pork. KuneKunes are a true multi-purpose pig. They are friendly, docile, smart, true grazers, do not tend to root or test fencing like the bigger commercial swine breeds. This is why they are winning over the hearts of America.

KuneKunes are originally from New Zealand where they were kept by the Maori tribe as a meat pig. They allowed them to roam free and they chose to stay close to the village. In the USA, we have been through various trends with this breed from pets only, to breeding stock and now a gaining popularity in pork production for homesteaders.

When I began in the breed, my interest were in breeding stock and pets. I too have moved in many directions with this breed. One of the reasons that this breed is so amazing – it's many uses. I too, now also use our stock for pork production. This is something I never saw myself doing when I began my journey with KuneKunes Pigs. I am an animal lover through and through and could not even imagine harvesting something that had lived here on our small acre farm.

Not every piglet is meant to be sold for breeding stock. I see an increasing number of KuneKunes being produced and sold for breeding stock when they should actually be culled. (I used to think that the word culled meant it was killed. It simply means that they will be raised and later harvested.) There are less than perfect piglets born all the time and they can serve many other uses. We have piglets in pet homes, in therapy homes and used in nursing homes as therapy animals to name just a few. In order for this heritage breed to continue to thrive in the USA, it is important only to sell the piglets of the best quality for breeding stock and to use them for their many purposes. In the past, I have sold the piglets for pets that were spayed and neutered. Now I realize what a wonderful outlet it is to also harvest them and to provide your family and friends with pork that you know how it was raised and cared for.

It seems to be a growing amount of people that care about the “factory” farms. When I see the videos of how these animals are forced to live, breed and care for their young it truly bothers me. Until those videos, I never really thought about the meat that I pick up in the super market in the meat department. Seeing those videos has altered the way I think. The mothers are forced to stand to feed their babies or forced down and held down by metal bars. They are not allowed to farrow in the nest of soft hay as nature tells them to. They raise their young under extreme distress. Then their babies are ripped from them at early ages and not allowed to stay and learn from their mothers. Then this cycle repeats itself over and over until the mom is too weak to do it again and then she is harvested.

When I look out over the fields and see the mom's grazing with their piglets - sneaking a suckle here and there - It is so peaceful and calm to watch. The natural environment that the mother creates and the way that she interacts with her offspring is amazing to watch. How she sings to them while they nurse and how she talks to them to move when she is trying to lay down. It is truly a humbling and peaceful experience. In all the heartbreaks of raising livestock, I think this is the reason that farmers get their strength to continue on.

I did a bunch of research and talked to other breeder's that were harvesting KuneKunes for their pork before doing it myself. The first time I tasted KuneKune Pork was at a Farm to Table Restaurant. I had a

very difficult time swallowing it, as I was thinking of my piggies at home. The second time, over a year later, I was introduced to KuneKune pork was at a show at another breeder's home. They had grilled the pork. It was excellent. That got me to thinking.....

I took a couple of pigs that I deemed not worthy of producing piglets and raised them in a caring environment with the same care and attention as all my other pigs. They were grazed, fed fodder, fruits and veggies and some grain. They lived a very happy and calm life. One that allowed them to enjoy their lives and be free to be pigs. Moving about as they chose, they lived a good life.

When they were approximately 125-150 pounds, they had reached the age of harvest. I thought this would be something I would not be able to go through with. However, I found a wonderful guy to help me harvest my stock and he even picked them up in his own trailer and loaded them in. My little piggies went off happy and munching away in the back of a trailer. I must confess that I did cry a bit when they first pulled away. (Any one that knows KuneKunes know that they are funny, affectionate little creatures and you cannot help but, get attached to them.) Not too long after they were gone, I felt better about my decision and began to look forward to the return of the pork. I was told that your harvest would yield about 67-75% of a pig's weight and found that to be very true. KuneKunes produce a marbled red meat that is surrounded by fat which helps keep the flavor in better.

So, I made it through sending them off and receiving the pork back.....now for the true test! To eat the pork. My husband cooked a package of the sausage for breakfast one morning and I can tell you honestly that it was wonderful! Move over Jimmy Dean! I am not normally a big sausage fan but, this was truly amazing. Next, I tried the pork chops. They were so tender that you could cut it with a fork. Unbelievable to taste such a fabulous meat. I shared our meal with family from out of town and they too could not believe how wonderful it was. In that moment, I realized what farmers from years ago must have felt.....proud. I was proud that I raised these pigs with care in a friendly, grazing environment and was about to feed my family and friends.

Some folks are not ready to harvest something that they raise. I totally get that! I was there once and I am glad that I have evolved with the breed as so many others before me have done. Not every piglet was meant to be bred and with KuneKunes there is another outlet for the not so perfect piglets.

I hope that you enjoyed this article and found it helpful in learning more about KuneKunes Pigs and there many uses.