Today, the United States is one of the world’s leading pork-producing countries. The United States became the largest pork exporter in 2005 and remains so today. In 2016, 26 percent of U.S. pork and pork variety meats was exported — export value per head averaged $50.20.

More than 100 countries bought U.S. pork during 2016.

The 1980s and 1990s brought major technological developments to the pork industry. Enhanced genetics, improved reproductive efficiency, improved disease control, increased lean muscle growth and more allowed pork production to grow in states such as North Carolina, which is now the second largest pork-producing state in the U.S.

When this technology was introduced, packing plants could be located near points of production instead of near points of consumption. Large terminal markets with rail road access sprung up in Chicago, Kansas City, St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sioux City, Iowa. Live hogs could be shipped to market en route, and pork products could be shipped nationwide to consumers.

One of the first real uses of the refrigerated railroad car and Friendship Car Company plant in 1872 was for the refrigeration train. When the refrigerated railroad car transformed the meat industry.

The refrigerated railroad car transformed the meat industry.

ANCIENT TIMES –
On Manhattan Island, a long, solid wall was constructed on the northern edge of the colony to protect colonists. The wall also helped keep stray pigs off limits to farming fields of crops. This area is now known as Wall Street.

“Drovers” Herd Pigs to Market
Moving pigs to market in the 1840s was no small undertaking. Drovers herded pigs along trails, which later developed into railroad routes. Between 40,000 to 70,000 pigs were guided from Ohio to eastern markets annually. The drovers’ hired hands each managed up to 100 hogs. Herds moved five to eight miles a day, covering total distances of up to 700 miles.

The Transportation Revolution and Pork

When Christopher Columbus headed to Cuba in 1493, Queen Isabella insisted that he take eight pigs. However, Hernando de Soto is dubbed the “father of the American pork industry.” In 1529, the explorer landed in Tampa Bay, Florida, with America’s first 13 pigs on board.

FIRST EXPANSION –
Pig production spread throughout the new colonies, including Hernando Cortez introducing hogs to New Mexico in 1600 and Sir Walter Raleigh bringing hogs to triangular Jamestown colony in 1607.

FIRST HERDS, FIRST RATIONS –
As the 17th century closed, the typical farmer owned four or five pigs. This supplied salt pork and bacon for the farm family, with some left to sell as barreled pork. Following common practice in Pennsylvania, pigs were fed a diet of native American corn.

MOVE ‘EM OUT –
After the Revolutionary War, pioneers began heading west, taking their indispensable pigs with them. A wooden crate filled with young pigs often was hung from the rear of covered wagons.

EARNED NICKNAME –
As western herds grew, so did the need for facilities to process pork. Pigs were first commercially harvested in Cincinnati. The city easily earned its nickname with more pork packed there than any other place in the mid-1800s.

“Porkopolis” was coined around 1835, when Cincinnati was the country’s chief hog packing center. In the 1840s, a quarter of a million pigs were processed annually.

The transportation revolution established the pork industry in the upper Midwest, where the Corn Belt provides ample amounts of feedgrains.

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