

Pig Farmer interview questions

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What to expect

Pig farming interviews are practical and direct. Employers are trying to work out whether you can run a shed on your own, whether you will follow biosecurity rules when nobody is watching, and whether you can lead a small team through repetitive work. Expect the conversation to move between technical detail and real scenarios from the farm.

- **Technical and herd management:** Questions on breeding cycles, farrowing, weaning, nutrition and herd health, often using the farm's own numbers and records.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Situations such as a biosecurity breach, a disease outbreak, a breakdown in feed or climate systems, or staff shortages during farrowing.
- **Behavioural and team leadership:** How you have handled staff, rostering, training and conflict on a piggery, using real examples from your past roles.
- **Safety, compliance and biosecurity:** WHS obligations, APIQ audits, PigPass movements, effluent licence conditions and antibiotic stewardship.
- **Commercial and planning:** Stock planning against processor contracts, feed costs, culling decisions and budgeting for the unit.

Most piggery interviews start with a phone or video screen with the farm manager or owner, covering your background and availability for weekend and on-call work. If that goes well you are invited on site, usually for a walk through the sheds with the manager and sometimes the site vet or production manager. The tour doubles as the interview: they watch how you move around animals, whether you ask about biosecurity before stepping in, and how you talk to the shed staff. A final conversation with the business owner or HR often covers rostering, pay structure, housing and how the farm handles training and progression.

1. Walk me through how you plan a farrowing batch from mating through to weaning.

Why they ask

This is the core planning skill of the role. They want to see whether you can think in cycles, crates and shed space rather than treating each day in isolation.

How to structure your answer

A chronological walk-through works best here. Start at the mating plan, move through sow condition and transition feeding, then farrowing, then weaning, and finish on how you review the batch against the plan.

Example answer

"It starts with the mating plan. I work back from the target weaning date and the shed space I will have available, then set the sow groups so farrowing crates turn over without doubling up. About a week out I check body condition scores, move sows into the farrowing house onto a transition ration, and make sure crates, heat lamps and creep areas are clean and dry. During farrowing I roster someone on the shed around the clock, because that is when you save piglets, and I record everything in PigCHAMP as it happens instead of at the end of the week. At weaning I go back over the batch: how many piglets weaned, which sows needed help, what the feed intake looked like, and what I would change before the next group comes through."

2. Tell me about a time you picked up a herd health problem before it spread through the shed.

Why they ask

Early detection is what separates a good stockperson from an average one. They are listening for how closely you watch animals and how quickly you act.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the situation briefly, describe what you noticed, explain the action you took and who you involved, then give the result and what it changed on the farm.

Example answer

"We had a batch of weaners in a grow-out shed that were quieter than usual at feed time. Nothing dramatic, just a few not coming up to the trough and some coughing at the back of the pen. I walked the whole shed pen by pen and pulled out the ones I was worried about, checked temperatures and rang the vet that morning rather than waiting to see how they went. We sent samples, confirmed what we were dealing with, and treated the affected pens early with the vet's advice. The rest of the shed stayed clean, we lost very few animals out of that batch, and afterwards I changed the daily shed check so we record feed intake pen by pen, which makes a drop show up a day earlier."

3. You arrive on a Monday morning and a delivery truck has entered the site without following the shower-in and vehicle wash procedure. What do you do?

Why they ask

Biosecurity breaches are the single biggest risk on a piggery. They are testing whether you act immediately and calmly, not whether you can recite a policy.

How to structure your answer

This is a judgement under pressure question. Contain first, then verify and record, then report up the line, then fix the system so it does not happen again.

Example answer

"First I stop the situation getting worse. I hold the truck where it is and keep the driver away from sheds and stock, and I do not let anyone else in behind it. Then I find out what actually happened: which gate, what they touched, whether they went near a shed, and what the driver understood about our procedure. I record it and tell the farm manager straight away, because with something like this the vet and the production manager need to know the same day, not at the end of the week. Depending on what the truck contacted we might restrict access to a shed, step up cleaning or monitor a group of pigs closely for a few days. Then I look at why it happened. Usually it is the delivery procedure, not the driver, so I would check whether our signage, induction or gate setup let someone slip through and do something about that before the next delivery."

4. How do you keep a small team motivated on repetitive shed work, especially with weekend and on-call rosters?

Why they ask

Turnover is expensive on a piggery and farrowing does not stop for weekends. They want someone who can hold a team together and share the load fairly.

How to structure your answer

Blend a behavioural answer with your approach. Give one concrete example, then set out how you run a team day to day.

Example answer

"I start by making the roster fair and visible. If everyone can see how weekend and on-call duties rotate, and that I take my share of them, most of the resentment disappears before it starts. In my last role we had a stretch where two people were away during farrowing and the shed crew was stretched thin, so I ran the morning checks myself for a fortnight and used the handover each day to show what we had actually achieved rather than just the problems. I also train people on the whole shed rather

than one task, because people who understand the breeding side and the numbers tend to stay interested. When someone is doing a good job on stockmanship I say so and give them the harder jobs, and when there is a problem I deal with it face to face that week rather than letting it sit."

5. What does preparing for an APIQ audit and an EPA effluent inspection actually look like on your farm?

Why they ask

Compliance questions are standard in pork. They want to know you treat records and licences as part of production, not as a scramble the week before.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a walk-through of your routine, covering records, physical checks and who is responsible for each part.

Example answer

"I run it so there is nothing to catch up on. Records are kept current: PigPass movements, treatments and withholding periods, feed and water checks, inductions and training, all filled in as the work happens because nobody remembers a treatment accurately three weeks later. Physically, I walk the effluent system every week, checking pond levels, pump and irrigation setup, fences and any signs of seepage or run-off, and I keep a simple log so there is a history to show an inspector. Before a scheduled audit I go through the checklist myself against the sheds and the office files, and fix the small things early. If a vet, inspector or auditor arrives unannounced, I can hand them the records and walk them through within the hour."

6. Processor contracts change or a contract weight range shifts. How do you decide what to sell, what to hold and what to cull?

Why they ask

This role sits between the sheds and the abattoir. They want someone who can make a commercial call, not just follow a feeding chart.

How to structure your answer

Treat it as a decision-making question. Set out the inputs, the constraints, the options, then what you would monitor after deciding.

Example answer

"First I get the facts straight: what the new weight range or delivery window actually is, when it applies from, and how much shed space I have behind the current batch. Then I run the numbers in Excel on feed cost per day against the price for the weight range they want, because there is a point past which holding an animal costs more than the extra weight is worth. From there it is a set of options. Sell the pigs that already fit, hold the ones that will fit within the window, and use the space that frees up for the next batch. Culling decisions come down to whether a sow or boar is still earning its feed, and I would rather move those on early than carry them through two more parities. Once I have decided, I check it against shed capacity and stock numbers so the farrowing plan does not fall apart, and I watch feed intake and growth over the following weeks to confirm the call was right."