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# Iberian pigs

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The Iberian pig is a colour-coated and early maturing breed usually kept in woodlands of *Quercus ilex* and *Quercus suber* in the southwest of the Iberian peninsula. For several centuries it has been submitted to hard climatic conditions, poor housing facilities and oscillating feeding levels through the year.

The main characteristics of this breed are:

1. In a time when most of the autochthonous Mediterranean breeds of pigs are under danger of extinction, the Iberian pig has a sizable population number, due mainly to economic motives.

2. It is usually reared under extensive conditions very similar to the traditional ones, under which other improved breeds could not compete.

3. Its slaughter weight is very high (140-170 kg)

relative to that of improved breeds used mainly for fresh meat.

4. Its economic interest lies mainly in three natural-cured carcass joints: hams, forelegs and loins. This breed is particularly suitable for curing, having a considerable amount of intramuscular deposition of fat. This has a low melting point and confers excellent conditions for prolonged periods of curing, and gives its products a marbling aspect and an excellent flavour.

5. Its cured products were traditionally obtained through an artisanal production system. Presently, a specific industry is developed around the breed. Its cured products are clearly distinguished in the market. The price of a cured ham from an Iberian pig fattened on acorns and pasture is now three times greater than those obtained from other breeds under different feeding systems.