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Get ready to pig out -- organically

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Three weeks from today, a pig in Emery County will give birth to a new Utah industry. The proud sow, who in true farm tradition remains nameless, is expected to bear a litter of eight to 12 piglets destined to arrive on someone's table as Utah's first organically produced pig knuckles, link sausage, head cheese and sliced bacon.

"We'll have ham by Christmas," said Russell Taylor of Taylor Natural Farms in Emery.

The state-certified organic pork will represent the second foray into organic meat production by the Emery-area rancher. Along with his father David, Taylor helped introduce Utah-raised **organic beef** three years ago to a growing, natural foods-hungry population.

For pork to be certified as organic by the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, pigs must be allowed to run unencumbered in pastures and provided with food free of herbicides and pesticides. They can be given no antibiotics, hormones or growth stimulators.

Also, the meat must be processed in a certified-organic facility.

"We've met with quite a bit of success and seen a strong increase in demand for our **organic beef**. We hope to see the same results with our pork," Taylor said. "It costs about one-third more to produce organically certified livestock, but you do end up getting a premium for the product."

Seth Winterton, organic project coordinator for the state Agriculture Department, said 45 farmers, ranchers and processors in Utah currently are certified to raise or handle organic products.

"We have farmers producing organic wheat, beans, vegetables and alfalfa hay," Winterton said. "We have an organic fruit farm near St. George and even a coffee grinder who is certified to process organically grown coffee beans."

Demand for Utah-produced organic products is growing, he said.

Industry statistics bear that out.

Retail sales of organically produced goods are expected to reach \$30.7 billion by 2007, based on a projected compound annual growth rate of 21.4 percent between 2002 and 2007, according to statistics supplied by the Massachusetts-based Organic Trade Association.

In addition, organically produced meat is one of the industry's fastest growing segments, said Holly Givens, association spokeswoman. She noted that \$3 million worth of organic pork was sold nationwide in 2003, 68 percent more than the previous year.

Organic products now are available in nearly 20,000 natural-food stores and 73 percent of conventional grocery stores. And they now account for an estimated 1 percent to 2 percent of total food sales in the United States.

For piglets to be certified as organic animals, Taylor said the sow must be cared for under strictly controlled conditions during the final trimester of her gestation.

"You can always tell when a sow will pig," he said. "It takes exactly three months, three weeks and three days" from the date she's bred.

Although Taylor expects sales of organic pork eventually will contribute to the his farm's economic growth, most of his business' revenue still will come from sales of an organic fertilizer mined from a "75-million-year-old leaf pile."

"Ours is a model farm," he said. "And what we try to do with our beef, and now pork, is show our [fertilizer] customers how organic farming can be done."

Taylor initially expects his organic pork to be sold at Emigration Market in Salt Lake City, which also sells his "Taylor-Made Beef."

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This unnamed sow at Taylor Natural Farms in Emery will soon give birth to Utah's first litter of certified organic pigs. After awhile the porkers will be bound for area meat markets, and dining tables. Ryan Galbraith/The Salt Lake Tribune

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