PIG PRODUCTION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS
I. Village Pig Production

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SUMMARY

In 181 villages in the Solomon Islands the pig:human ratio was 1:5.8 and the annual per capita pork consumption was 4.2 kg. Some communities did not keep pigs or eat pig meat. Sows weaned an average of 5.5 piglets per year and mean live-weight at 12 months of age was 28.4 kg. Most pigs were kept on the ground but some were housed in pens over the sea and very few lived in their owners' houses. Pigs were important in the social life of the people but proportionally fewer pigs were raised than in neighbouring Pacific countries.

INTRODUCTION

The Solomon Islands formerly the British Solomon Islands Protectorate has a total land area of 29,800 km², made up of six large islands and many smaller islands and atolls (Fig. 1). At sea level the monthly average minimum and maximum temperatures rarely fall outside the range of 22 to 31°C and the average rainfall is approximately 330 cm (Anon, 1969). Most islands have streams and rivers which flow continuously but on some of the inhabited reefs and atolls water is scarce. Apart from coastal coconut plantations and village vegetable gardens most of the land surface is covered by jungle.

In general the islands are lightly populated. The average population density is 4.7 persons per square kilometre, varying from an estimated 309 per km² in parts of the Reef Islands to less than one per km² on Vanikoro (Anon, 1969). Villages range in size from the members of one family to groups of several hundred people. For administrative purposes the Solomon Islands are divided into four districts (Fig. 1).

Mendana's expedition of 1568, the first European contact with the Solomon Islands, found pigs on every island visited: Santa Ysabel, Florida, Savo, Guadalcanal, San Cristobal, Santa Ana and Santa Catalina (Guppy, 1887). More recent visitors reported pigs on Vanikoro (Dillon, 1829), the Shortland Islands (Guppy, 1887), Ranongga and Malaita (Rannie, 1912), and Sikaiana (Woodford, 1916), but there were no pigs on Ontong Java (Hogbin, 1934), Tikopia (Dillon, 1829, Firth, 1939) or Rennell (Lambert, 1946, Birket-Smith, 1956).

Dillon (1829) recorded a fully-grown pig no bigger than a cat. Woodford (1890) described the Solomon Islands pig as small, flat-sided, round backed and with a long snout. The most common colours were black, red and black, and grey, and some of the piglets were striped. General accounts of the importance of pigs in village life have been given by a number of people including Guppy (1887) and Scheffler (1965).

Although no data on reproduction or growth were collected, observers agreed that production was poor and attributed this to nutrition, genetic limitations, parasites and management (Turbet, 1944, Anon, 1958). Osborne (1960) reported to the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) Government on pig husbandry generally. He suggested that there was in fact a shortage of pigs and that poor performance was

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probably due to the combined effects of protein deficiency, kidney worm infestation and the lack of controlled breeding.

The present study was carried out during 1967-69 when the author was the Veterinary Officer in the BSIP. Its purpose was to document the pig population husbandry systems and levels of production to enable comparisons with production in neighbouring countries and elsewhere, and to provide a basis for future work.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study embraced all the main islands and most of the smaller islands and atolls of the Solomon Islands. One-hundred and eighty-one villages containing 2,974 pigs were studied. Observations were made on the colours and conformation of pigs, on housing and husbandry systems and on the types and quantities of feedstuffs, frequency of feeding and provision of drinking water. The customs and attitudes of the natives with regard to pigs were observed.