

Raising Pigs with Purpose: The Story of PIGGLY

Across Europe, the **mEATquality** project is working closely with farmers to understand how extensive husbandry practices can improve meat quality, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability - while still supporting farm economics. Behind every transition lies a personal story: a motivation, a challenge, and a vision for the future.

Today, we travel to Northern Italy, where **Sergio Visini** runs **PIGGLY – Birla Società Agricola S.R.L.**, a farm that has become a reference point for sustainable pig production.

A Farm with a Vision

Nestled among the gentle landscapes of Verona and Mantova, PIGGLY stands out as the **first Italian pig farm certified 100% Antibiotic-Free from birth**. Here, pigs are born, raised, and finished in facilities created with a single idea in mind: *comfort first*. Light, fresh air, space, calmness — everything has been designed to reduce stress and support natural behaviour.



PIGGLY is part of high-quality salami chains, including producers of Prosciutto San Daniele for the U.S. market. But behind this premium status lies a long journey of innovation.

The Beginning of a New Philosophy

“The project was born in 2009 with the aim of creating a sustainable agriculture model, attentive to true animal welfare and respectful of the environment,” Sergio recalls. “We chose the production sites with great care. The project was carried out without constraints or cultural legacies, involving professionals from outside the pig sector.”

With no old structures to adapt or habits to fight against, PIGGLY was shaped around **animal welfare, low stress, and measurable sustainability**. Antibiotic-free production and a certified carbon footprint became central goals - and later, important achievements.

Powered by Nature

When the farm became fully operational in 2017, expectations quickly turned into results. “Animal welfare improved dramatically,” Sergio explains. “We barely use antibiotics (only for individual animals) and stress behaviours, such as tail biting, disappeared.”



The farm’s design plays a key role. PIGGLY follows a principle Sergio calls **functional simplicity**: carefully designed barns with natural ventilation, quiet spaces, and easy-to-manage flooring systems. The approach supports both the animals’ comfort and the team’s daily work.



Energy follows the same logic. Solar panels line the roofs, producing clean electricity. A biogas plant transforms manure into heat for the weaning barns and offices. Each year, the system produces millions of kilowatt-hours of renewable energy, and the remaining digestate fertilises the fields. Inside the barns, a natural microorganism spray helps keep odors and ammonia low.

“Nothing is wasted,” Sergio says. “Everything feeds into the next step.”

The Courage to Innovate

Every big change brings challenges, and PIGGLY’s transformation was no exception.

“Our strategic vision was our lighthouse,” Sergio says. “We knew we could improve animal welfare and reduce our environmental impact. That conviction pushed us through every doubt.”

Today, visitors from across Europe come to see how PIGGLY combines straw bedding, natural air exchange, insulated floors, and continuous barn-air monitoring. The farm is often cited as an example of practical, forward-looking design.

“We’ve shown that pigs cared for respectfully produce better meat - and that farmers can lead the change our sector needs.”

What Helped Along the Way

When asked what supported him most, Sergio doesn't hesitate.

“Business culture,” he says. “High-quality supply chains depend on farmers, and associations help us share knowledge and grow together.”

PIGGLY's emphasis on simple, thoughtful structures has also created a calmer environment for workers, making observation and care easier and more meaningful.

Three Words that Define the Journey: Vision - Competence - Determination

A Message to Fellow Farmers

Should others embrace more extensive and sustainable practices?

“Absolutely,” Sergio says. “Farmers should once again be seen as key actors in shaping their territories. Food and land tell the story of a civilisation.”

But he also highlights a practical truth:

“These practices must be economically sustainable. PIGGLY shows that when done well, sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand.”

The story of PIGGLY is a reminder that the future of farming is already here. With thoughtful design, renewable energy, and genuine respect for animals, Sergio Visini has built a system that is good for pigs, good for the land, and good for business. His journey shows that meaningful change is possible — and that it begins with a clear vision and the courage to follow it.



This material was prepared by Tatiana Kugeleva (Ecovalia) and Paolo Ferrari (CRPA). All photos are provided by Sergio Visini.

The *mEATquality* project aims to provide consumers with better-quality pork and broiler meat and animals with a high level of welfare by developing scientific knowledge and practical solutions together with farmers and chain partners. The project is coordinated by Wageningen Research (The Netherlands) and is a multidisciplinary team of 17 partners organisations representing 7 EU countries. The project is running from October 2021 to March 2026



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