



FARM & FIELD

You could travel the world to experience different foods. Or you could go to Northside Diner

“I’ve always enjoyed food,” Isabella says. “Growing up [in Italy] and traveling around Europe, it’s just a real foodie scene, and I’ve always been a good eater from ever since I was a baby, which I am now starting to appreciate how great that must have been for my parents. The menu took about three years to really do some research and put together basically all of my favorite things,” she continues. “I wanted variety with a lot of classic dishes that people will always want on a menu in Iowa, but then adding some of my favorites that expand people’s palates a bit and give them some options that they don’t have to drive out of town for.”

‘I can’t believe we can get this in Washington’



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Northside’s hand-breaded pork tenderloin sandwich gets extra crunch from crushed soda crackers, paired with a soft brioche bun.

BY CHERYL ALLEN

Spend some time getting to know Northside Diner in Washington, and you’ll discover an interesting question being asked: can you be committed to locally sourced ingredients and serve dishes customers would otherwise have to travel to access?

You could say Isabella Santoro, who owns the diner with husband Ed, embodies that tension. The child of a Washington-native mom and Italian-born dad, she was born and raised in Italy, then moved to Washington as a teenager. She is the product of two worlds, a local woman with an international twist.

“I’ve always enjoyed food,” Isabella says. “Growing up [in Italy] and traveling around Europe, it’s just a real foodie scene, and I’ve always been a good eater from ever since I was a baby, which I am now starting to appreciate how great that must have been for my parents.”

She looks over at baby Alice, eight months old today.

“The menu took about three years to really do some research and put together basically all of my favorite things,” she continues. “I wanted variety with a lot of classic dishes that people will always want on a menu in Iowa, but then

adding some of my favorites that expand people’s palates a bit and give them some options that they don’t have to drive out of town for.”

Scan the menu and you’ll see the result: Iowa classics like pulled pork, hot beef, meat-loaf sammies and crispy fried chicken sit side-by-side don-buri, poke, banh mi, and falafel wraps.

At the same time, “We are all about local,” Isabella says. “We think it’s important to know where your food comes from, and the less distance it has to travel to get to you, the better for the environment and for your body, because it’s grown in the same environment that you’re in, and it supports local farmers, which is also a big thing. We live in such an agricultural state that it really only makes sense.”

So as much as possible, Northside Diner uses Iowa-grown and raised ingredients. Organic eggs come from Kalona. Beef comes from Marek Land & Livestock in Riverside. Kombucha comes from Hedge Apple Kombucha in Fairfield. Maple syrup comes from northern Iowa. And in season, fresh fruits and vegetables come from the Washington Farmers Market.

But some things – things that you think would be easy – are hard to source locally. Things

like pork, in Iowa’s number one pork producing county.

What’s up with that?

There are a handful of barriers, Isabella says, but one of the key ones is that the restaurant’s purchases are small and fluctuate week-to-week. That makes it hard for farms to accommodate when they must advance-plan to meet demand; not only do they need to raise the right number of livestock, but FDA-inspected meat processing facilities must be booked months ahead.

“Flexibility” is what Northside Diner needs, Isabella says, which is why they are relying on Marek Land & Livestock for pork throughout pork month. “We literally send them a text, and they bring us what we need,” which can be more than once a week during busy times. “There’s no delivery fee, there’s no, ‘Oh, well, you know it’s a holiday on Monday,’ or whatever, things you run into with the bigger purveyors.”

You might think, problem solved, but maybe not long-term, as the Mareks primarily raise pigs for show.

For the customer, that’s an incentive to enjoy Marek pork at Northside Diner while they can. And you can count on it not being served as your standard pork chop.

“We try to get a little more creative, like the Cuban sand-

wich,” Isabella says. “A lot of the specials we do, most people that come in have never heard of it or never had a chance to

have one, because it’s not something you find around here. Like the Pork Smash Burger, and we’ve done a Vietnamese Caramelized Pork Bowl – that was something people hadn’t tried before, and that one’s really popular as well.”

Northside’s Cuban is a sandwich made with warm ham, roast pork, Swiss cheese, pickles, yellow mustard, and mojo sauce. “It’s kind of a tangy sauce, and that’s pressed into a hoagie,” Isabella says. It’s a special on the menu this October.

Folks have been raving about Northside Diner since it opened in early 2024 in the historic spot previously home to Winga’s Café. “I just had this kind of wild idea to do my own thing,” Isabella says, having previously been involved with her mom’s restaurant, Café Dodici. “I’m very relieved, very happy that there’s been a lot of support.”

Customer behavior varies, just like that local-international philosophy of food. There are those who love the classics, and there are those who appreciate the unfamiliar. There are those who order the same meal every visit, and there are those who try something new every time.

“It’s a nice balance of appreciating what we’re doing,” Isabella says.



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Northside’s cold Harmony bowl consists of purple rice and quinoa, sesame-ginger roasted vegetables, hummus, tamari-glazed peanuts and kale chips, with a choice of protein.

How does pork get from farm to fork?

Knupp Farms’ transport drivers make the connection

BY CHERYL ALLEN

Let’s imagine you’re sitting down to breakfast this weekend and you’re about to enjoy a few strips of bacon.

The chain of events that made that bacon possible began mid-April with the birth of a piglet at a breed-to-wean facility. Around the first of May, that piglet was weaned and transported to a finishing barn. By the first of October, it reached market weight and was taken to a packing plant where it was harvested. The belly was sent to a smokehouse to become bacon, and the bacon was boxed and sent to a grocery distribution center. From there it was delivered to a grocery store where an employee placed it on the shelf, and you selected it for purchase.

That, in brief, is the story of your bacon.

“On the transportation side, from the farm to the packing house, we are step one of the food chain,” Tanner Knupp, owner of Knupp Farms in Washington, says. “The farmer has to grow the animal. Once that animal is ready for harvest, they have to count on us to get it there.”

Knupp Farms specializes in livestock transport, mainly pigs. Established in 1977 by Tanner’s dad, Carl, with a single truck, today the fleet includes 21 trucks and 16 livestock trailers that move about 1.2 million pigs a year.

Every day, year-round, trucks haul loads of weaned pigs to nursery barns, feeder pigs to finishing barns, and market pigs to processing facilities. The trailers can accommodate anywhere from 160 market-size pigs to 2,400 baby pigs.

“The alarm clock goes off anywhere from midnight to 5 a.m. to 2 p.m. It’s all hours of the day,” Knupp says. “Driver gets up, gets dressed, gets changed, and he is in charge of his rig. He’s in charge of the pigs. He drives them safely and effec-

tively to the plant, and then he has to also safely and humanely unload the livestock. All of it is on the driver.”

Drivers are at the core of a challenging business. This is not a sit and wait, no-touch freight world. This is a world of active, living cargo that must be loaded and unloaded with care.

“This is a farm job that you happen to be driving a semi,” Knupp says. “We’re in the trailer with the livestock, 280, 300-pound pigs. We’re in the trailer with them when we’re hauling three-deck feeder pigs, 50, 55-pound feeders. We’re on our hands and knees with those pigs, unloading and loading them. We’re just as much involved as that animal. When it’s hot out, we know it’s hot for the animal. When it’s cold out, we know it’s cold for the animal.”

The day begins with a clean, disinfected trailer and an eye on the weather. If it’s a hot day, the pigs are dampened before departure using the trailer’s water system; because they don’t sweat, this is needed so they stay cool in the breeze while moving. And if it’s a cold day, extra panels are attached to the trailer, and bedding is added so they stay warm.

And then the pigs have gotta get on the bus.

“Some days are good, some days are bad. They have attitudes just like humans. When they want to cooperate, man, it’s fun,” Knupp says. “I truly believe a healthy pig moves a lot better. That’s pretty standard. Genetics – maybe it’s a pig that wants to move and run versus walk and lope – genetics definitely helps for what we’re doing.”

Once the pigs are boarded it’s time to head out. Where they’re going depends on the integrator, the business coordinating the supply chain.

“Sometimes they can sell them to Kansas City. Sometimes they can sell them to their backyard. Anywhere from one loaded mile up to 500 loaded miles, maybe more,” Knupp says. “For us on the livestock transportation side, we get a schedule. We go where we are told.”

The pigs could be on a five-hour ride to St. Louis or Chicago. How do they occupy their time?

“They’re not jumping and



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“Pork never sleeps,” Knupp Farms says on its Facebook page. “When pigs need moved, Knupp Farms is ready to roll.”

doing cartwheels by no means, but they’re up and moving, and they’re squealing and they’re playing,” he says. “If they go on a two-hour ride, then you probably find them laying down, relaxing.”

Once they reach their destination, the driver unloads the pigs, cleans the trailer, and picks up another load for the return trip, maximizing time and efficiency.

If that sounds like a lot of work, it is.

“This job’s not easy,” Knupp says. “It’s a lot more labor intensive than a lot of people think.”

“I believe that we have a good foundation, good teammates that understand that some days are good and some days are less good,” he continues. “As long as you can always look at the glass half full and say, ‘I still have more in me. I still have more energy. I can still do it,’ we’re good to go.”

“There are tough days. There are mentally, physically exhausting days that you just don’t know what you can do to be better, and it happens. But as long as you can get through that day and know tomorrow’s a new day, it’s a good day.”

And it’s rewarding. When Knupp considers those million-plus pigs they deliver every year, he thinks about how much food the business helps put on the table.

“We are part of feeding how many people?” he marvels. “You break it down on how many slices of bacon that is, and how many pounds of sausage. Once you look at it on a global scale, on a large scale, it’s like, wow, we’re actually being useful.”



CHERYL ALLEN/THE NEWS

Knupp Farms owner Tanner Knupp, inside his Washington office. “Excellent livestock haulers have really good personal pride, really good attitude, and just love to be where they need to be,” he says.

Knupp doesn’t lose sight of the purpose of all those pigs.

“It starts on the farm. It ends with your fork,” he says. And his fork is “50/50 pork and beef, hands down.”

“I really love all aspects of it. I love a good ol’ ham. I love a good steak. I love pork chops, I love ribs, I love bacon, I love sausage. I’m definitely a fair share guy on meat and meat,” he says. “I don’t mind turkey, it’s just not what we haul, right? I don’t mind chicken, but it’s not what we haul.”

Although Knupp Farms is a family business, seven years ago Knupp didn’t see himself here. But he saw the door open, and “if you have good teammates and good employees and good coaches along the way, you can make a really, really good business out of it,” he says. “So that’s what we did.”

Let’s get back to that breakfast in front of you; you don’t want it to get cold. Go ahead and enjoy that bacon; it’s taken a lot of hard work over the last seven months to bring it to your plate.



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Kalona’s newest feed store: built on family

Levi and Jena Duwa carry on a legacy at Quality Plus Feeds in Kalona

BY CHERYL ALLEN

When Levi Duwa met Jena Stukerjurgan, neither of them was contemplating a career in agriculture. Levi, a Mid-Prairie alum, studied entrepreneurship while playing football at the University of Iowa, and Jena worked as a neonatal ICU nurse at the University. Five years ago, they married and started a family.

But today you’ll find them staffing Quality Plus Feeds in Kalona, a new outpost for the Saint Paul, Iowa-based company. And the fundamental reason for that is family.

Jena’s parents, Jerry and Amie Stukerjurgan, were poised to buy out their partner at Quality Plus Feeds in Saint Paul, a town south of Mount Pleasant, when Jerry passed away unexpectedly following a car accident. Jena, Levi, and Jena’s brother Jacob rallied to support their mom, “So that’s what kind of brought us back into the ag industry,” Jena says.

Fortunately, both were familiar. Jena’s family raised contract hogs while she was growing up, and Levi grew up on a cattle farm.

“It’s been very hard at times, but it’s also been a lot of fun to carry on [my dad’s] legacy and

do it together as a family,” Jena says. “That’s kind of what we strive for every day now, doing it with our family, helping other families, and that’s really important to us with being a family-owned company.”

For the last four years “we were more stuck in the backside of things,” Jena says, but now that she and Levi have opened their own retail location, “It’s fun to be interactive with the people walking in and out. We opened in July, and that brought in some kids and families, just with fairs and stuff, and I enjoy seeing the kids and their families walking in and out. It’s been good.”

Levi enjoys being back in his hometown, getting to talk to people he hasn’t seen in years. “It’s really fun,” he says. “This is a very, very tight-knit community up here, and the support they’re giving us is awesome.”

While feed is milled in Saint Paul from local grain, the Kalona store’s focus is bagged feed for a wide range of animals: cattle, horses, swine, goats, sheep, poultry, rabbits and even deer and household pets. The Duwas hope to be a source for everyone, from hunters with feeding stations to those who raise livestock for show.

“We like to service everybody, and we’re able to do that on the bag side,” Jena says. “If people have chickens in the backyard, we can do that. If people have a herd of cattle, we can also service that. Any customer that comes through here, we try to do our best to service them.”

Being able to offer value, quality and convenience are top priorities, but customer



CHERYL ALLEN/THE NEWS

Levi and Jena Duwa, outside their new Quality Plus Feeds retail location on Highway 22 in Kalona.

service is number one, Levi says. The Duwas are fortunate to have a team they can call on for expertise, including their in-house nutritionists in Saint Paul, so they can help customers determine what best fits their needs, whether that be a package off the shelf or a custom mix.

Freshness is one way they set themselves apart from the competition. “Our feed is pretty fresh because we have a lot going out the door, so then that means we’re making a lot,” Jena says. And all of it is non-GMO and ractopamine-free.

Capacity and capabilities are another. “We can pellet, we can bag, we can tote, we can haul it out in bulk, we can make texturized feeds that have molasses in them,” Levi says. “There’s a lot of places that don’t have those capabilities anymore, so those are some niche markets we can get into.”

The Quality Plus Feeds location on Highway 22 abuts Amish country; it’s not uncommon to pause for e-bike or buggy traffic while turning into the driveway. The Duwas hope to be a source for their Amish neighbors, many of which Levi

met previously while working as a salesman for another feed mill.

Looking ahead, the couple is excited to be involved in the Kalona-area community. They hope to continue traditions the Saint Paul location has established, like customer appreciation days and dinners for Pork Month and Beef Month.

And they do this knowing they have family at their back, family that includes employees who have been with the company for decades and “are a huge asset to us.”

“I think it takes everybody to make it go,” Jena says. “It

takes the brain power of the people that have been there for years and have the experience in the company, and I think the younger generation, the ambition that we have, and the technology and how we can make things more innovative, I think is a huge asset as well.

“To bring those together, I think, is great for the company as a whole,” she says. “We’re very excited to see what the upcoming years bring us.”

Quality Plus Feeds is located at 2440 Hwy 22, Kalona. Reach them at 319-460-9700.



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The foundations of sustainable farming

The agricultural sector is built on plants and animal life, but the industry can still affect the environment in ways that contribute to the ill effects of climate change. According to data published in a 2022 report from McKinsey & Company, agriculture accounts for nearly one-quarter of global emissions, and was identified as the industry that contributes the most to exceeding planetary boundaries. Sustainable farming practices can help reduce that impact.

Even though there is growing consumer demand for more environmentally friendly products, farmers in the United States are lagging behind when it comes to adopting sustainable practices, even though they are aware of them. McKinsey reports that 90 percent of U.S. farmers have an understanding of sustainable farming, but adoption of these

practices remains low. Here's a look at some of the sustainable farming practices and what the agricultural sector can do to foster a better planet.

Regenerative techniques
Healthy soil often equates to a healthy planet. The cornerstone of sustainability lies in the soil. The soil serves as a carbon sink and a water filtration system. By avoiding traditional "tilling" farming, farmers can maintain the soil structure. This will reduce erosion and keep carbon sequestered in the ground. Farmers can plant cover crops like rye or clover in the offseason to prevent soil erosion, suppress weeds and increase the organic matter of the soil. Diversifying species planted in fields will break pest cycles and naturally replenish soil nutrients over time. This can reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Efficient irrigation
Global water scarcity continues to be a concern, and sustainable farms will prioritize water stewardship. In utilizing drip irrigation, which delivers water directly to a plant's roots, farmers can reduce evaporation and runoff when compared to overhead sprinklers. Collecting and storing rainwater runoff for use during drought can minimize the strain on local aquifers.

Biological pest controls
Farmers can rely on the use of integrated pest management strategies to offset chemical pesticide use. By introducing natural predators, farmers can control certain pest populations. For example, ladybugs can reduce aphids on plants. Relying on traps to collect pests also can slow pest outbreaks and reduce reliance on chemicals.

Creating fertilizers
Farmers can use the waste produced on their farms by turning it into valuable fertilizer. According to the USDA, biochar is a black carbon produced from biomass sources



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like wood chips, plant residues, manure, and other agricultural waste in a low-oxygen environment through a process known as pyrolysis. This material can be used as a soil amendment to improve water retention, nutrient uptake and fertility. Chicken litter, bone

meal, blood meal, and compost tea are examples of farm waste-derived products that can be used as fertilizers.

Sustainable farming is a step toward the future that protects the land without compromising output



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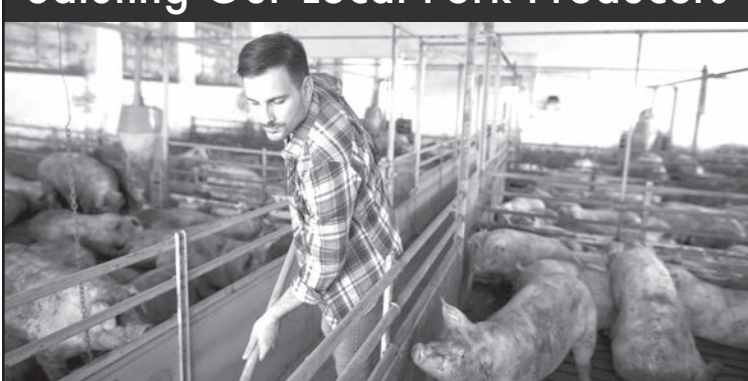
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Putting farm waste to good use

Agricultural waste poses a challenge for farmers, even if the subject does not garner a lot of attention outside of rural areas. Farms generate enormous amounts of organic waste, including crop residues, fruit peels, sawdust, and livestock manure. Farmers must decide how to get rid of agricultural waste legally and economically.

If not disposed of properly, farm waste can pollute the environment, particularly the air and waterways like rivers and streams. It is best for everyone to mitigate agricultural waste to create further hazards. Farmers may not have considered recycling some agricultural waste, but it is a way to transform this potential hazard into something that can be used on the farm itself or sold commercially. The following are some considerations for putting farm waste to good use.

Compost
Animal waste, crop residues and additional organic material can be combined to create nutrient-rich compost. Compost is utilized to improve soil structure, fertility and water retention. This helps reduce reliance on chemical fertilizers. By investing in large-scale composting tools, farmers can process hundreds or even thousands of tons of organic matter each year. While some can be used on the farm, the excess can be sold at a profit.

Biogas
Biogas production is carried out through a process known as anaerobic digestion (AD). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says AD involves bacteria breaking down organic matter, such as animal manure, wastewater biosolids and food wastes in the absence of oxygen. As the bacteria digest the waste, they generate biogas, which is mostly comprised of methane. Capturing biogas can reduce



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greenhouse gas emissions on a farm, and the biogas can be turned into a renewable energy source to power electricity, heating or transportation, according to Prime Dumpster Incorporated.

Digestate
Anaerobic digestion does not only produce biogas. Digestate is the solid and liquid effluent remaining after the process, says the EPA. Digestate can be used in many applications, including animal bedding, fertilizers and a foundation material for creating bioplastics and other bio-based

products.

Recycling
Certain items used on farms cannot be turned into compost or fertilizer. However, recycling containers, tires, cardboard, rubber, and plastics offers the potential for these products to be made into new items. Western Packaging says recyclable items can be kept separate from other waste so they can have new life outside of landfills.

Seeing farm waste as an asset and not a problem can help farmers save money and resources.

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Celebrating Pork

BY DEBRA PERSONS

It's National Pork Month! It's my favorite time of year, when we celebrate all things pork.

Pork in a sandwich is definitely something to celebrate.

Americans eat, on average, six sandwiches per week. That's a lot of delicious cold cuts, bacon, pulled pork and pork tenderloins!

Putting food inside bread has been practiced by people for thousands of years. They just didn't call it a sandwich until John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, requested to have his portion of corned beef served between two slices of toast, so that he could keep playing cards.

The Earl's first sandwich of beef was in 1762, but history notes that quite quickly after that, the ham sandwich became the most popular sandwich at the card table.

My Iowa Grandma Birdie made a fine ham sandwich on her homemade bread with German mustard, chopped green pepper and a little dillweed. It tasted like summer.

But I must confess, this spring I traveled outside of Iowa to sample some pork sandwiches.

I had a fabulous pulled pork sandwich in Alabama. It was smoky and tender and barely

even needed the complimentary BBQ sauce.

You can make extraordinary pulled pork at home with the help of your crockpot.

Crock Pot Pulled Pork

One 4-pound pork shoulder roast. Trim excess fat, lightly salt and pepper, and set aside.

In a crockpot, add the following:

- 1 chopped onion
- 6 oz. tomato paste
- 1/3 c. cider vinegar
- 1/3 c. honey or sugar
- 1-2 Tbsp. molasses
- 2 Tbsp. Worcestershire
- ¼ c. water
- 2 tsp. smoked paprika
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 2 tsp. mustard powder
- 1 tsp. liquid smoke (optional)
- 1 tsp. salt
- Pinch of cayenne (optional)

Mix well, then place pork, fat side up, into the crockpot on top of the sauce.

Spoon some of the sauce on top of the pork.

Cover and cook 8-10 hours on low or 5-6 hours on high until very tender.

Remove the cooked meat to a platter or big bowl and shred



with two forks.

Set aside.

If you want a shiny sauce that is slightly thickened, then combine 2 Tbsp. cornstarch with 3 Tbsp. cold water in a cup and whisk it into the hot sauce.

Cover and let bubble for 20 minutes or so.

When the sauce is thickened, add the shredded pork.

Stir well and serve.

While in Springfield, Illinois, learning all about Abraham Lincoln, I was very excited to try the iconic Illinois sandwich called the Horseshoe.

The Horseshoe sandwich was created by Chef Joe Schweska and his wife Elizabeth in 1928 at the Old Leland Hotel in Springfield, Illinois.

The sandwich was a hearty, open-faced sandwich that mimicked a horseshoe. The ham was cut into a horseshoe shape and placed on a piece of toast. It was covered with a creamy cheese sauce and topped with a large amount of french fries.

The ham represented the horseshoe, the french fries were the nails, and the cheese sauce held it all together. It was originally served on a sizzling metal platter; it was all



a nod to the blacksmith who made horseshoes.

Leland and Elizabeth kept their cheese sauce recipe a secret until 1939 when they allowed their local newspaper to publish it. I am only allowed to share the ingredient list, and also I may tell you their secret ingredient.

The famous cheese sauce called for a butter and flour roux where whole milk was added along with salt, cayenne pepper, dry mustard, Worcestershire sauce and Olde English sharp cheddar. The secret ingredient was the addition of dark Near Beer, since they created the cheese sauce during the Prohibition Era.

There might even be a place in your own hometown that makes dark, no alcohol beer today. Stop in and ask them for some.

While in Florida, I had a fabulous BLT with the most delicious homegrown tomato. It was so fun to eat a vine-ripened tomato well before our Iowa tomato season. The sandwich had a roasted peach aioli which paired wonderfully with the bacon.

Here is a close approximation to the sweet and spicy aioli.

Peach Aioli

- 1 c. mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp. peach preserves
- A couple drops of cider vinegar
- Pinch or more of cayenne

Place the above ingredients in a bowl and stir well.

Use as a sandwich spread.

Here in Iowa, I might have to say that the best pork sandwich is the pork tenderloin.

Almost every community in Iowa offers an excellent pork tenderloin. Many of these sandwiches have been named in our famous Iowa's Best Breaded Pork Tenderloin Contest. The winning list is put out every year by the Iowa Pork Producers Association. I pay very close attention to their yearly nominations.

My favorite pork tenderloin is battered. But fans of the breaded pork tenderloin will battle me over this.

I could not conclude my celebration of National Pork Month without offering up some pork trivia for you to enjoy.

So here goes...

Wall Street gets its name from a wall built to keep free-roaming pigs out of lower Manhattan.

A pig's squeal is louder than a motorcycle and almost as loud as a jet engine.

Pigs outnumber humans in Iowa.

You can be sure there is so much to celebrate about pork.

I hope you get to try some of these amazing pork sandwiches soon.

I am always on the lookout for a delicious pork sandwich.



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