

## Agricultural production

# China's high-rise hog farms go international

Livestock producers tout benefits of rearing pigs in multistorey buildings

**Thomas Hale** in Ezhou and **Wang Xueqiao** in Shanghai

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Deep in central China's Hubei province, two vast 26-storey buildings tower over neat vegetable gardens — housing, not for newly urbanised local residents, but hundreds of thousands of pigs.

The “pig skyscrapers” in the rural outskirts of Hubei's Ezhou city are the most extreme example of Chinese [livestock](#) companies' adoption of multistorey industrial farming, a model they are now taking abroad.

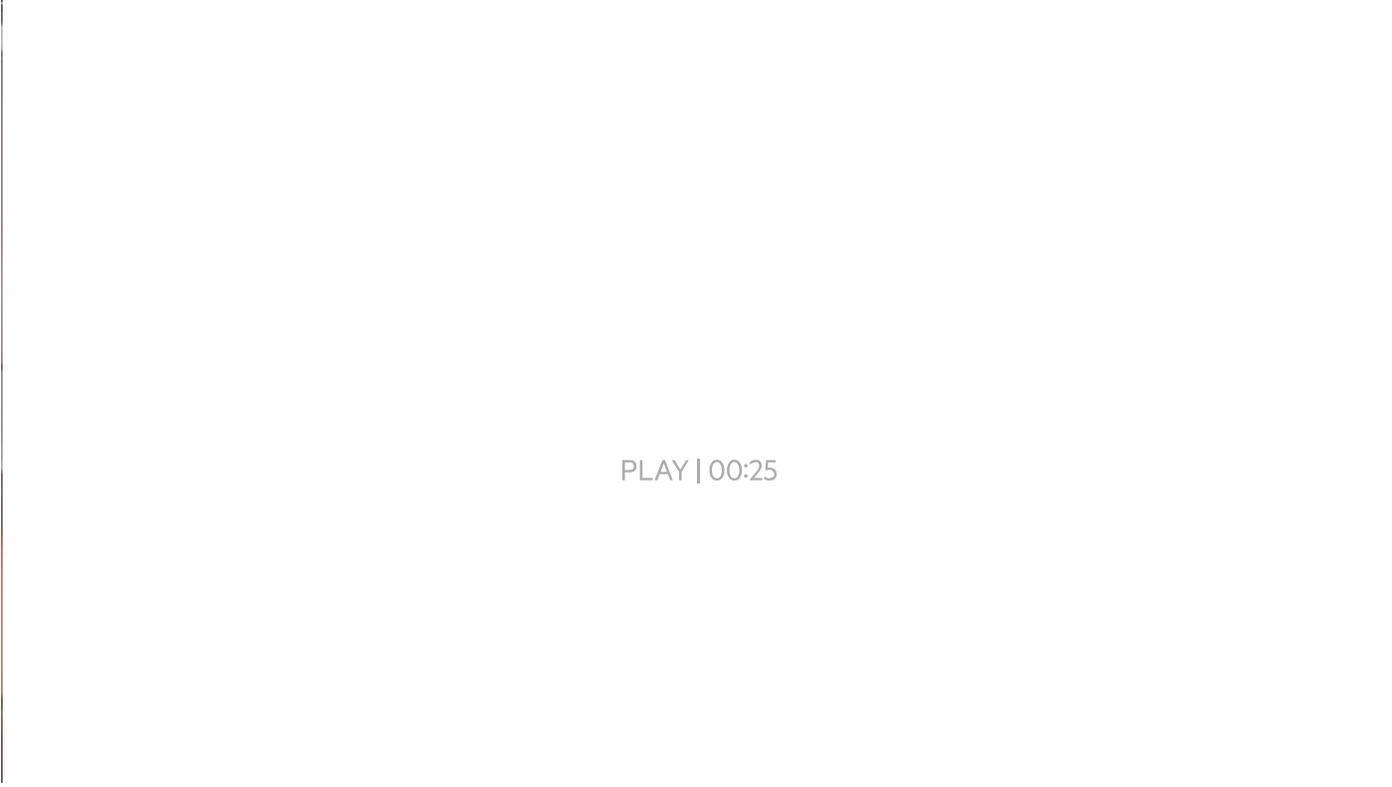
Muyuan Foods, which is the world's biggest pork producer by sales and raises pigs in buildings up to six storeys high, is working with Vietnamese agriculture business BAF to launch construction this year of high-rise hog houses in the south-east Asian nation.

“We have replaced the traditional single-storey hog farms with multistorey hog houses in order to improve operational efficiency and land use efficiency, promote manure and waste recycling and ensure biosecurity,” Muyuan said in the prospectus for its \$1.4bn IPO in Hong Kong last month.

The Vietnam “mega project” would include the country's first multistorey pig farms and feature “the most advanced farming technology worldwide”, BAF said last year.

Ian Lahiffe, an agriculture consultant in Beijing, said the promise of tighter biosecurity and advanced ventilation technology was opening the way for [China](#) to market its multistorey approach overseas.

“People are beginning to realise, although it’s a crazy idea, [that] from a buyer’s perspective it kind of works,” Lahiffe said. “I think the Chinese way of managing pigs is going to be more and more relevant to the rest of the world.”



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Muyuan Foods' multistorey pig farm houses hundreds of thousands of pigs © CCTV

The rush for high-rise pig farms accelerated after an outbreak of African swine fever in 2018 that devastated herds. Pigs were widely raised by ordinary Chinese households until a generation ago and the practice persists in parts of the country, but government concerns about environmental protection and biosecurity have led to the encouragement of commercially managed farms seen as better able to reduce disease risk.

A 2019 notice from the ministries of agriculture and resources formally permitted the use of multistorey buildings for livestock farming and a year later Muyuan opened the world’s largest pig farm, a complex that includes 21 six-storey buildings and combines feed production, farming and slaughtering.

The company has said its overall annual production capacity was 81mn pigs in 2024 — far more than the output of the world’s third-largest national producer, Spain — nearly a tenth of them in multistorey buildings.

Such buildings incorporate “sterilisation and deodorisation systems”, with fifth and sixth floors reserved for “pregnancy and lactation” and fourth floors used as nurseries, according to Muyuan’s IPO prospectus.

A similar focus on technology is evident at the Ezhou complex. Operator Zhongxin Kaiwei Modern Farming said in a social media post in December that its “intelligent systems enable precise feeding, disease prevention and control, and environmental management”.

Up to 1.2mn pigs can be reared each year in the two buildings, and the company said it planned to add a new slaughtering and processing line this quarter.

While the Ezhou farm’s height is exceptional, Lahiffe said most major Chinese pig producers now operated multistorey farms. “It’s just a combination of the ventilation systems and dealing with the excrement and using all sorts of Chinese automation to make it work,” he said.



Pork being dried in the sun in a village near the Ezhou pig farm © Gilles Sabrie/New York Times/Redux/eyevine

Guangxi Yangxiang, a large pork producer based in the mountainous southern region of Guangxi, operates 11-storey farms, according to local government media. Brokerage Huaxi Securities has said the company also operates one of 17 storeys.

The company last year planned to develop a pig farm in South Korea, according to local media, but this was dropped after opposition from animal rights activists. Yangxiang did not respond to a request for comment.

Multistorey pig rearing is rare outside China. A six-storey building known as the “Schweinehochhaus” or “pig high-rise” that was established in then-communist East Germany closed in 2023 after repeated accusations of animal cruelty.

Animal welfare groups have criticised the use of multistorey farms over what they say is often barren and overcrowded artificial environments, while also warning that rearing so many animals in small areas actually increases the risk of disease.

Ezhou farm operator Zhongxin Kaiwei declined to comment or to allow access to its high-rise buildings. Local residents have previously been quoted as complaining about foul smells from the complex, but there was no obvious odour in the neighbourhood when an FT reporter visited.

One local resident was sanguine about the farm’s presence, saying it had created employment opportunities in the area. “Before, we used to travel elsewhere for work, now it’s on our doorstep,” he said.

Land availability is also a factor in China’s use of multistorey technology. Muyuan says its use reduces the company’s need for farmland by more than 4,000 acres.

The operator of the Ezhou pig farm has said its 'intelligent systems' enable precise feeding, disease prevention and environmental management © Thomas Hale/FT

Wang Tenghao, general manager of breeding at Qinglian Food, which has three four-storey farms in eastern Zhejiang province, said official rules requiring pig rearing to be at least 500 metres from any residence encouraged “vertical” farming.

“I personally believe it’s essentially about solving the land problem,” he said, estimating that there were now 20 to 30 multistorey pig farms in Zhejiang, compared to only one a decade ago.

Wang acknowledged that airflow between floors posed a biosecurity challenge, since disease could spread rapidly depending on the ventilation system, while high animal densities meant odours could spread further.

“The pressure on environmental protection is quite significant,” he said.

Muyuan says it has an R&D team with 6,300 staff, its own proprietary environmental control system and a “data-driven genetic selection platform”.

The company also places a heavy emphasis on automation, saying in its prospectus it used “automated inspection and alarm systems” to monitor hog health and that its automated feeding systems reduced labour costs.

Wang of Qinglian Food, whose family kept its own pigs in the 1990s, said China’s rapid urbanisation in recent decades had created a shortage of agricultural workers. “True farmers . . . are very few,” he said.

Beijing is seeking to [limit China’s pig population](#), which has rebounded to more than 400mn in recent years, in order to reduce oversupply and support prices — an approach that is further encouraging producers to expand overseas.

Lahiffe said he expected the Vietnamese multistorey farms — which local media say will rise to six storeys — to be a “kind of copy and paste” of Muyuan’s domestic model.

“If other countries want to go that way, instead of having to go through multiple iterations themselves, they’ll probably buy from an existing Chinese player,” he said. “I assume they’ll offer very attractive terms to build these things.”

*Additional reporting by Daniel Tudor in Seoul*

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