

# ORIGINS OF THE POTBELLIED PIG



*Typical characteristics of a Vietnamese Potbellied Pig in the mid-80's - early 90's*

Although potbelly pigs have been domesticated for hundreds of years, it's nice to know a bit about where your lovable pet has come from. You research about your ancestors, right? So why not know about the ancestors of your best potbellied friend?

We all know that potbellied pigs are a direct descendant of the old world wild pig family that ranged Eurasia from the Mediterranean to Siberia for 40,000 years. But how did they get to America?

The first group of 18 potbellied pigs came to America from Canada during the mid-1980's by Keith Connell, a Canadian zoo director. These potbellied pigs were bigger than the ones we have today (they averaged up to 190 - 250 lbs. and therefore, were miniature pigs when compared to domestic swine that weigh 600-1500 lbs.). They were all black and wrinkled around the head and face. When Keith Connell imported this original group, little could he have realized just what an impact these were destined to have on the pet market. Intended as breeding stock to supply zoological gardens, they were to prove to be the foundation stock for the new pet on the block in the USA. Keith named them the "Con Line."

Shortly after Keith Connell's "Con line" was imported, at least two other local breed types of potbellied pigs were brought into the USA. The "Lea Line" imported by a breeder named Leavitt (gentle disposition, white and black markings, somewhat smaller) and the "Royal Line", imported by a breeder named Espberger (mostly white, somewhat larger than the "Lea Line"). In fact, these pigs, Con, Lea and Royal, represent most of the foundation stock found in America today. All were descended from regional varieties in Vietnam. The different lines provided a larger gene pool to work with, give us a healthier breed type and enable breeders to develop more desirable characteristics (size, disposition, color, conformation, etc.) better suited for domesticated companion "House Pets."

In the short space of a few years, potbellied pig ownership expanded at quite a remarkable rate. There were many official associations that controlled the registration of these pets, clubs for pet owners and there was a highly organized show system. (**Editors note:** SCAMPP was formed in 1991, although some of our original members had potbellied pigs before that time). There are not as many registries, organizations or shows as there once were. The vast majority of all registered potbellied pigs in the USA can be traced back to these original lines.

The question is ... Why is there such a wide variety of breed types in the first place? Because potbellied pigs are the same species as ordinary farmyard pigs and wild boars, they are capable of interbreeding. Many potbellied pigs have been crossed with various farm pig breeds and other potbellied pig types, such as the KuneKune from New Zealand and the Yucatan Pig (also know as the Mexican Hairless Pig) just to name 2 - therefore, we have the Great American Potbellied Pig melting pot!! There are so many "miniature pig breeds" these days, but ultimately, the majority of miniature breeds in the United States are linked to each other in one way or another. Many common labels or nicknames for the miniature pigs of today include: Teacup, Micro, Super Micro, Nano, Pixie, and Pocket Pig. These nicknames are not considered breeds, but selling or marketing tools. Most pigs nowadays are a cross-breed of some kind although the cross breeds are not recognized as actual breeds, but classified merely as miniature pigs.

When the first potbellied pigs were sold in the USA, their market price ran well into the thousands of dollars. Nowadays, due to so many breeders interbreeding and cross-breeding, or not getting their pigs neutered or spayed, and/or breeding and selling for financial gain, along with the fact that so many people are giving up their pigs for various reasons, there are many homeless pigs that we cannot even adopt out most of these pigs for free. Keep in mind, these pigs are not to be raised as a food source (even according to the USDA). Sadly, there are not enough responsible homes with folks to properly love and care for these precious creatures and many end up in overflowing shelters, sanctuaries and rescue organizations. (**Editor's note:** SCAMPP personally believes that the breeding needs to drastically decline, due to the fact of the over-abundance of unwanted potbellied pigs these days).

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*The above information was gathered from several internet sources, which all seem to be commonly stated.*