

Raising a Pig for Show

This guideline is intended to assist exhibitors with their first pig show project. The suggestions listed are intended as an aid and does not replace the guidance of your Ag teacher, County Extension Agent, or other qualified individual.

Facilities - What is the first thing to do when you decide that you want a show pig? First you will need somewhere to keep it. Here are some suggestions for your pig pen.

- 1) Pen should be dry. I know that pigs like mud but muddy pens can cause lameness, pigs do not gain as well in mud, and it makes it difficult to work with your pig.
- 2) Pen should be covered. You will need to provide protection from the heat and sun in the summer and the cold and rain in the winter. White pigs or any pig with white on them will sunburn especially after they are clipped for show.
- 3) Provide at least 60 square foot (6ft X 10ft) per pig if on concrete and at least double that amount if on sand. Pigs that are kept in small pens will require more exercise.
- 4) A exercise pen is a good idea, but pigs can be exercised out in the open.
- 5) Clay and blackland soils usually do not make good pens. These soils are hard on the pig's feet and legs.
- 6) If pig is kept on concrete, layer with either wood shavings or river sand. These pens must be cleaned regularly and the shavings or sand replaced.
- 7) Clean fresh water must be available at all times. People often underestimate the amount of water a pig requires.

Picking a pig. What are some of the things to consider when picking a pig?

- 1) Ideally the pig should be between 6 and 7 months old at show time. Most shows require that the pigs weigh between 230 lbs and 270 lbs at the show. Pigs that are younger than 6 months old may not be enough at show time. Pigs that are too old may need to be held and may lose their muscle shape.
- 2) Breed is a personal choice however crossbreds will win the show over 50% of the time. However in shows that show by breed, there are advantages to showing purebreds, for example the Duroc or Yorkshire division may not be as competitive as the Cross division.
- 3) Make sure that the pig has received vaccinations, if not ask your veterinarian about vaccinating the pig. Pigs should also be eartagged. This is the way breeders identify pigs and is required at the major shows.
- 4) Pick a pig that is tall, long, wide, muscular, and walks smoothly. Currently the judges are picking pigs with production traits, such as larger bodies, more bone, more width between the front and rear legs, and a little more fat on them than a couple of years ago. The judges want muscle shape such as a wide flat top and a big butt. Remember that pigs that win are complete hogs, for example the biggest butted pig or the longest pig will probably not win the show. The pigs that win are pigs that have a combination of all of these traits.

Feeding a pig

1. Pigs can be self-fed until they weigh 120 pounds, sometimes larger depending on how much weight the pig needs to gain and how fat the pig is. It is hard to describe when a pig is getting fat, but some indicators are that the pig looks round over his top and over the ribs, or looks loose or soft on its belly and under its neck.
2. The feed should be at least 16% protein, younger pigs (under 120 lbs) need a higher protein than 16 %.
3. Supplements (mineral supplements, vitamin supplements) can be used but probably are not necessary with a good feed.
4. After the pig reaches 120 pounds it should be fed approximately 2 pounds of feed 2 times a day depending on how much gain is needed. Pigs at this time should be weighed twice a month.
5. At approximately 160 pounds, the amount of feed may need to be increased to 2.5 pounds twice a day.
6. Once pigs reach 200 pounds, it is best to weigh them once a week. Weigh pigs before feeding at the same time each time to get a more accurate weight.
7. At all weights, the rate of gain must be monitored. If a pig is gaining weight too fast consult your advisor on how best to slow its rate of gain or to hold the pig at a certain weight. There are different ways to accomplish this, it will depend on the frame size of the pig and how lean the pig is before you control its rate of gain. If a pig is not gaining enough weight, the amount of feed should be increased.

Working with the pig.

1. The first step to working with a pig is to tame it. A pig should walk up to you when you enter its pen. If it runs, go into the middle of the pen and stand still. After the pig realizes that you are not chasing it, it will become curious and investigate what you are. Slowly let it approach you and then start rubbing it. A nervous pig may take a week or more before it will let you rub it all over.
2. The next step is to teach the pig commands. A pig showstick or a piece of PVC pipe will be required. Start working with the pig in its pen. Slowly start tapping the pig on the side of its head to encourage it to turn. Tap - do not hit! Pigs are smart and have good memories. If you hurt the pig, getting it to do what you want will be harder. To encourage it to go, tap it on its ribs. Do not tap it on its back or butt. The pig will learn, but it will take time, be patient.
3. Once your pig has learned some commands, it is best to walk the pig in a larger pen. Try to teach the pig to stay away from the fence. A good rule is to turn the pig before it gets to the fence. Pigs like to walk along fences and look for openings. If this happens at the show, your pig will be very difficult to show and for the judge to see. Get someone to stand in the pen and act like they are the judge. Try to keep the pig from 10 to 15 feet away from them. Practice keeping the pig between you and the judge. If your pig runs, calmly walk up to it, if you run your pig will just run more. If your pig becomes hot, put it back in its pen and mist water on its nose and feet.
4. Pigs need exercise. A pig that is not exercised may become fat and will tire easily. Usually during a pig show, each class will take between 15 and 30 minutes. If a

pig has not been walked at home, it will tire and become very hard to manage. If it tires its muscles will also become tight and cause the pig to walk stiffly. Start the exercise program slowly, walking the pig for only 5 or 10 minutes at first and then increasing the time each day.

5. Wash the pig once a week and add a conditioner after washing. This will help to make the pig's hair shine. Starting two weeks before the show, wash the pig every two or three days.

At the show

1. It is important to know what your pig weighs every day and how much feed and water it is drinking and eating. Water makes the most difference in the pig's weight. A quart of water weighs about 2 pounds and a pig may drink a gallon (4 quarts) at a time. That means it would gain 8 pounds. The best idea is to water the pig several times a day with smaller amounts of water. A pig that is losing weight is generally not getting enough water, however a pig that drinks too much at one time may become too full and look potbellied. Also pigs that do not get enough water will lose some of their muscle shape. This is most noticed when their top becomes round, instead of flat.
2. Pigs need to be exercised at the show, the pens are usually small and the pigs become stiff. Normally walking them 5 minutes two or three times a day will help keep them loose.
3. If it is hot at the show, make arrangements to have a fan. If it is cold make sure that the pig has some protection from the cold.
4. Try to use the same feed, shampoo, and other supplies that you have used at home. Anytime you switch products, it may cause a rash or upset stomach.
5. Stay calm, the more nervous you are, the more nervous the pig will be.

Other information

- 1) Deworm pigs every 30 to 45 days, it is best to switch wormers each time. Ask your advisor for the proper wormers for your area.
- 2) The more you work with your pig the better it will act at the show.
- 3) Read your fairbook!!! For example, know when the tag in date is, entry deadline, how many FFA or 4-H meetings you must attend, when the pig must be at the fair, the weight limits, and what hair care products are allowed.
- 4) I almost left out the most important item about raising a show pig. Have fun and enjoy your project. Learn all about your pig, how it likes to be scratched and what it likes to do. Pigs are a lot of fun and each one has its own personality. They are a great project.