



4-H Parent Guide

4-H Swine Project

A Guide for Raising Pigs

Selecting a Pig Project:

- 1. Market swine** – Market swine projects last approximately four to five months each. Pigs are purchased around eight to 10 weeks old (30-70 pounds) and raised to market weight, which is around 250 pounds. When showing pigs, they are evaluated mainly based on their carcass traits, muscling and structure.
- 2. Breeding swine** – Gilts (young female swine) can be shown either as registered animals or commercial gilts. Rather than being evaluated mostly on their muscling and carcass traits, they are evaluated on their breeding characteristics.

General Care and Management

Health Care

Sanitation:

- Clean and disinfect housing and feeder regularly
- Remove and replace wet bedding

Internal parasites

- Good sanitation prevents and controls worms
- Deworm upon arrival and one month later; continue as needed

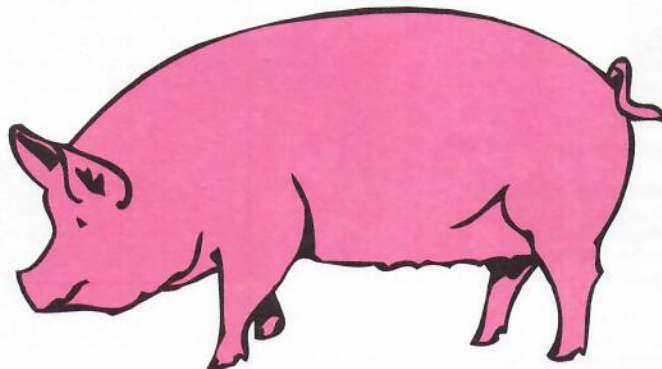
External parasites

- Mites, lice, fleas, ticks and flies
- Treat with appropriate insecticide

When raising swine, it is a good idea to have open communication with your breeder and a veterinarian for proper health management protocols.

Exercise

Exercise for show pigs is extremely important. It helps build the pig's endurance and improves showmanship skills. Start with short walks to build your pig's stamina, increasing to 30 minutes of exercise or more.



Swine Facts:

- Pigs are not dirty. They cannot sweat, so they roll in mud to keep cool.
- Pigs do not overeat. They eat until they have met their energy requirements.
- Hogs are smart animals. They can learn to push a lever to get water and raise a top to get food.
- Pigs weigh approximately 2.5 pounds at birth.



Feeding Facts:

- Fresh water needed daily.
- Fresh feed daily.
- Monitor weight gain and body condition.
- Adjust the quantity of feed and supplement nutrients when necessary.
- Change the rations over several days to a week by mixing in the new feed and gradually increasing the amount of new feed. Do this until you are feeding the new ration.
- Rule of thumb: 3 pounds of feed for every pound of weight gain.

Project Costs

1. **Create a budget** and stick with it!
2. **Pig cost** – Pigs can be purchased from local breeders or pig sales. Average cost is approximately \$200 but can get more expensive.
3. **Feed cost** – Approximately 875 pounds of feed are required to raise a 260 pound market hog. At an average cost of \$25 per bag, that comes to about \$438. Additional supplements can be added to the pig's diet, which would increase the overall feed costs.
4. **Shelter** – Shelter must be provided when raising pigs. Shelter must consist of a cover, floor and protection from whipping rains, sun and north winds. Flooring can be either dirt or concrete. Although concrete is more expensive, it can be kept cleaner and more sterile, thus improving pig health and cleanliness. If concrete floors are used, additional bedding, such as wood shavings, can be used. This would lead to more labor and increased costs, due to changing shavings every three to five days.
5. **Animal health**– Pigs should be vaccinated and dewormed regularly. Costs depend on types of medications and frequency needed.

Housing and Pens

Housing

- Minimum size should be 3 feet by 5 feet per pig or not less than 15 square feet per pig.
- Housing should be constructed to allow protection from weather. Housing should not allow water to enter the facilities during rain or snow.
- Housing should allow pigs the comfort of shade during sunny days and should be warm on cold days.

Pens

- Should not be less than 32 square feet per pig. Minimum size would be 8 feet by 4 feet.
- Fences should be a minimum of 32 inches tall.
- Pens/sheds should be built twice as long as they are wide.
- Water and feed area should be placed at opposite ends of the shed.
- Gates should be easy for you to open and close but should be secured to prevent pig from opening.

Selection

- Set goals for your project and select pigs to achieve those goals.
- Be familiar with the different pig breeds and their purposes.
- Select pigs that are structurally sound. Study the pigs as they walk toward and away from you.
- Market and breeding pigs will have different degrees of muscle. Keep in mind your project goals when studying muscle.
- Search for the best pig for your budget. The most expensive pigs are not always the best pigs. You will not go out and buy a guaranteed champion. Develop your champion with hard work at home.



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Pub. 3410 (1M) 7/15

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References: Dwayne Nunez, LSU AgCenter State Livestock Show Specialist Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom, <http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu/aic/lessons/extras/facts/swine.html>; University of Kentucky, <http://afs4hyouth.ca.uky.edu/swineproject>; Texas A&M University, http://texas4-h.tamu.edu/files/2011/12/publications_projects_swine_project_guide.pdf



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