

Selecting and Feeding Market Swine

It is always exciting to start fresh with a new swine project for the next county fair. Very soon you will be selecting your next feeder pigs to make into the champion. There are several important things that you should keep in mind when you are beginning your project for this year.

As you begin to think about the project you need to make some financial decisions. You need to decide what you will be able to spend when you purchase your pigs and how much it will cost you to feed them once you have them. In comparison to other livestock projects the overall cost of purchasing and feeding swine will be somewhere in the middle. It is not uncommon to have to pay from \$150 to \$400 when purchasing your pig or pigs. It will take an additional \$125.00 to 150.00 to feed a pig from 40 to 275 pounds if you use the cheaper feeds available. It will cost from \$300 to \$400 to feed some of the better show rations that are available from your local feed company. Now is a good time to discuss this with your feed dealer, feeder pig supplier and your parents to make the best choice available to you.

Your facilities play an important part of your success in a swine project. It is vital that you keep your new pigs warm when you first bring them home. Most likely these pigs have been raised in a heated nursery and are accustomed to being in a very controlled environment. Bringing them home and putting them in a drafty shed with little or no bedding will result in additional stress to the pigs due to cold. When young pigs are cold it increases their susceptibility to disease. In addition cold pigs will stay in the warmest place they can find and will not eat enough to gain well and can result in light pigs at fair time. Also it is important to remember that pigs raised in a nursery are not used to the sunshine and will sunburn easily much like you do in the spring when you spend a day out in the sun. On a cool day your pig may want to come outside and sun themselves and this can result in sunburn, which will also decrease gain due to the pain in walking. As the pigs grow and mature and we move into summer, our problems will change from too cold to increased heat stress. When the temperature goes up it is important that the pigs have a cool place to sleep and rest during the day. Providing a water hole in the pen is a common way to provide this cool spot but it will also offer some problems that you need to be aware of. Pigs need to have a clean dry pen to live in and are naturally one of the cleanest animals when they are given the opportunity. You need to keep the water hole limited in size so that it does not engulf the entire pen. When pigs have to swim through a water hole to get to feed or fresh water they will delay doing so until they absolutely have to. Once again they will not gain if they are not eating and drinking as needed. Ideally, if you can provide your pigs with a clean, dry, comfortable environment they will grow better for you. It is a good idea to cover the entire pen with some type of shade to prevent sunburn.

It is good to select a pig from a reputable producer who understands what you need in a feeder pig and is willing to assist you in making good decisions about your project. Dealing with someone you trust is a big help when purchasing your pigs. In addition, know the vaccination history of your pig. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when buying young livestock. Try to buy a pig that has been weaned for several days as that will increase the likelihood of your pig staying healthy when taken to a new environment. A good breeder will help you in selecting your pigs and be there to answer your questions when you need assistance.

Several factors need to be considered when selecting your feeder pigs. Finding a young pig of the correct size is critical. Starting with a pig that is too small will result in a panic when attempting to get your pig to gain an impossible amount of weight in the last couple weeks before fair. Just the opposite happens when you start with a pig that is too heavy. It is very difficult to hold (keep a pig from gaining) a pig and still have it looking attractive at fair time. Proper care of swine does not include limiting feed. Muscle is extremely important when selecting a young pig for show. Look for a pig with an expressive loin with a groove down his top that carries smoothly down into a deep full ham. Structurally, you need to look for a pig with a lot of natural base width exhibited by a wide natural stance, standing square on all four legs and large feet. Your pig needs to move out freely, comfortably and level in their design. Soundness is of the utmost importance because as pigs get older and larger there is much more weight to carry around. Look for a pig with a lot of natural extension of body and neck allowing this pig to continue to grow and not finish early.

Self feeders can be used early in your project but need to be watched to make sure that you do not run out of feed and that the feed is feeding well and staying fresh. Do not fill a large self feeder for 2 pigs and think the feeding is done for the project. Feed can get stale quickly and when using a self feeder you should not put more than a 2 week supply out at one time. Keep in mind that a pig eats more feed daily as it gets larger, so don't let the feeder run out. As your pig reaches about 175 to 200 pounds you need to re-evaluate your feeding program and consider hand feeding pigs individually to control the amount they eat so they meet their optimal weight at fair time. The following chart can be used for a guideline.

Weight	40 pounds	100 pounds	150 pounds	200 pounds
Pounds of Feed/day	3 pounds	4.5 pounds	5.6 pounds	6.5 pound
Approx. Daily Gain	1 pounds	1.75 pounds	2.0 pounds	2.25 pounds
Protein	18%	16%	16%	14%

Keep in mind that for a successful project it is important to start with good animal and feed them properly keeping clean fresh water available at all times. Water is critical at all times in a pigs life.

As you get closer to fair it is important to give your pigs some daily exercise and train them to be able to be on the move. You need to start slowly with an exercise program much as you would when you start a training program for your sports. Your pigs should be walked early in the morning and late in the afternoon to avoid over heating during the hot summer days. Gradually increase the distance you walk your pigs each day until they can walk for about 20 to 30 minutes and not show any stress in doing so. In doing this, your pigs will be trained to show and understand what you want them to do when you get to the ring and will be able to make it through a long showmanship contest.

Always be willing to ask questions and listen to advice as you work through your project. Your 4-H leaders and extension agents are always willing to help you and enjoy seeing you be successful with your project.