

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW
ABOUT SHOWPIGS—BUT
WERE AFRAID TO ASK

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There are many things to be considered when deciding on your next project. In this article we will attempt to help you answer as many of your questions as possible and I am sure there will be things left out. It is a large order to take and put all your thoughts down on paper, but here we go—we will see where we land.

LISTEN TO YOUR 4-H LEADER, EXTENSION AGENT OR VO-AG INSTRUCTOR—

First, if you have a 4-h leader, Extension Agent or Vo-Ag instructor, I think it is imperative to listen and heed their advice. Nothing will replace the sound advice that they can offer. Many of them are highly qualified to help you make the decisions that will have to be made in the months to come. You will also need their help in entering your pigs at the county and state level shows. I also think that their knowledge and wisdom and just someone to help you locally are invaluable. It never hurts to have someone, other than yourself, monitoring your project. I have found over the years, that we can all become “barn blind” meaning we might not see the little things that could make a big difference later down the road. Several times during our feeding period I seek out people I trust and know will tell me truth to view and analyze the pigs we are feeding. It always helps to have another set of eyes to look and make sure we are seeing everything we should. **IT WILL PAY GREAT DIVIDENDS LATER ON AS WE BEGIN SHOWING.**

BUDGET—How much is this project going to cost me? What can I afford?

There are many cost associated with showing a pig or any livestock. First, you have to have a good place to keep it. Is this place warm enough for the changes in temps we will see in the spring and if you are buying pigs in the fall is it warm enough for the winter we might have. 2) How much will a feeder and water cost — will I just buy a hanging feeder and water them from a pan? 3) Bedding—Will I use straw or wood shavings? What will that cost for the time I have this pig? 4) Feed cost—How much will this be? How much feed will it take to feed this pig from 50 pounds until it weighs 250-280 pounds. 4) Vet Cost—what will blood testing cost to go to the shows? What if my pig gets sick—what will this cost? 5)

Entry fees—How many shows will I be going to? 6) Last, but certainly not least, with all the above cost, what can I afford to pay for my pig or pigs?

We will not attempt to answer these questions for you because every situation is different—but we do think that it is important to think about these things before you buy a pig and to make as many plans as you can. We hope that we have sparked an interest in you to set down and carefully plan the cost associated with showing a pig. The benefits we know are great—but at what cost.

THE GREAT PIG HUNT—Where will I buy my pig? Will I go to sales, buy directly from the breeder off the farm? How about an online auction? Those seem to be pretty popular these days.

I think all have some merit and which ever one you chose, will probably be alright. I think there are some good questions to ask—no matter where you selection site or method is: 1) Health of the herd—What is the breeders vaccination program? Are there any apparent health problems? 2) Sire—Sometimes a pig is really hard to look at when they are young. Knowing what boar they are out of and maybe even the sow might help you determine the future of this pig.3) How have past siblings done at the show and can you tell me how they grew and what weight it is best to show them at? The breeder may not be able to answer all your questions but you might be surprised at what he knows about his pigs.4) Price—Saved the hard part for last—and you might should even start with this question. Hopefully you did your budget, so you know how much you can afford to spend. I will make a comment here—price will not be the determining factor in how successful you are with your pig. I do believe it takes a certain amount to play the game but my greatest accomplishments have come with \$250- \$350 pigs. And to close—How do we measure success with your pig? Think about that one because the answer is different for everyone that answers that question

BRINGING THE PIGS HOME—Hopefully much consideration was taken before you left home. Is my pen ready? Feeder? Water? Bedding? How am I going to haul my pig? Is it a warm, bedded box or trailer?

When I buy pigs I try very hard to make them as comfortable as possible. Many times you are taking them out of a very warm environment and changing everything in their life. I try to find out what the pigs have been eating and possibly buy a bag or maybe they will give me a little feed to get them started when I get them home. I think the main thought here is trying to make the transition as calmly and comfortable as possible.

What were the pigs drinking from when I bought them? If a pig has been on a nipple water, sometimes it will take them some time to get used to a pan or bowl. They need plenty of fresh, clean water during this transition. I like to make 2 sources of water available the first couple of days they are home.

A vaccination of Penicillin, Exceed or Excenel is a good idea just from the prevention side of things. Remember, other than weaning, this is the most stressful time in your pigs' life. Do everything you can to make them comfortable.

FIRST FEED—We are really not going to talk about brands of feed here. There a lot of good feeds out there. Chose the one that is easiest for you to get and will always be available when you need feed.

The first feed you get should be a Starter feed that is very palatable. It will need to be about 19.5-20.0% Protien, 5% fat and 1.3% Lysine. Do not dump the whole bag in the feeder the first day. I would suggest the first three days that you simply hand feed them so you will know how much they are eating. It will also give you a time everyday to let the pigs starting get used to his newest best friend!!!!

GROWING PERIOD—50-150 POUNDS

This is a critical time in the pigs' life because so many changes are taking place. First, we are setting the table and filling the plate for the future of this pig. All the critical muscle development is taking place in this period of time, so it is time to just feed the pig, let them grow naturally and gain all the muscle for a later date.

You never want to hold or slow down a pig in this part of their life. We can accomplish this later with much better results.

The feed you will need should be a 19% Protein, 4.0-4.5% fat and 1.2-1.3% Lysine. This is a good time in your pig's life to eat and just be happy. Time should be spent daily brushing and even several times a week letting them out of their pens and exercising.

At this point in your pigs life it is time to start a daily brushing and exercise program. Every day make sure that the bedding is clean and dry and if need be, remove wet or soiled bedding. **MY GOLDEN RULE; WHITE AND BLU-BUTT HOGS—NO SUN OR MUDHOLES!!!!** If your white hog ever becomes stained or sunburned, they will never be as white and shiny as you need to be to compete

at the top of the class. On the colored hogs daily sunlight will be a big benefit to them as it will darken their skin and when you do show them they will be shiny and dark colored.

WORMING—Worming needs to take place 3 times in your pigs' life while you have it. After you get you pig home and it is adjusted well, worm them. I suggest SafeGuard wormer and it is easy to use and easy to find. Then worm the pig every 30 days after that just like clock work. If you do go to jackpot shows and the pig is around other pigs, you might want to do it more often. But at least 3 times during the time you have your pig, you should worm it.

150 POUNDS—SHOW DAY

Now is the time we get our calculators out and do the math. At some point it will be time to start a weighing process and determining where we want the pig to be shown. As I said earlier, up until 150 pounds we are just going to let them eat and grow.

At 150 pounds we can start to manipulate the nutrition somewhat as far as protein, and fat. All of this will depend on each pig. They are different genetically and the way they look. So you will have to determine does my pig need more or less protein—more or less fat, etc.

I suggest to the families I work with that at this point we are going to start weighing the pigs once a week and charting their growth. We have an end point as far as weight goes and if I am going to hold one it will be in the 150 to 200 pound range. Our goal is to leave at least 21 days before the show for maximum weight gain and 30 days of good growth at the end is even better.

For example, if your show is August 10. You have decided that you pig will show and look its best at 270 pounds. We would like the last 21 days for the pig to be able to gain 2.5 pounds per day. If you multiply 21 X2.5 that number is 52.5 pounds. So 21 days back from August 10 is July 20.and you have already determined that your pig will look its best at 270 pounds, then on July 21 it should weigh no more than 217 pounds.

THE KEY TO BEING SUCCESSFUL IN THE SHOWRING IS SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING WEIGHT GAIN. AS MUCH TIME AND EFFORT NEEDS TO GO INTO THIS AS TIME SPENT BUYING, FEEDING AND FITTING. IN TODAYS SHOWRING PIGS MUST BE FULL, FRESH

AND HAVE NO STALE APPEARANCE. WE CANNOT HOLD AT THE END AND GET THIS LOOK.

HOLDING RATION—If we do have to slow one down in the 150-200 pound range there are several things we can do and one important thing we cannot do—NEVER WITHOLD WATER FROM YOUR PIG. IT IS CRUEL AND WILL ONLY BE DETRIMENTAL IN THE BIG PICTURE.

There are products out there that combine high levels of Protein, Fiber and Fat. All of these are important to maintain as much muscle shape while slowing the growth. If you are unable to buy one of these products, then the following ration has worked well and will get you close. Remember, that while slowing the pigs' growth, it is still vital that you weigh often to maintain our goal at the end:

HOLDING OR SLOWING RATION:

1 pound of your regular feed—daily
1 pound of Steamed Rolled oats—daily
6 ounces of a Fat source (liquid or dry)—daily
All the Beet Pulp they want—daily
All the water they want.

Normally, this will give us about 1 pound of gain per day. CAUTION—ALL PIGS ARE DIFFERENT—SOME WILL GAIN MORE—SOME LESS—THAT IS WHY WE NEED TO KEEP WEIGHING. WE NEVER WANT TO HOLD THEM TO LESS THAN 1 POUND OF GAIN PER DAY.

PAYLEAN—Is a tremendous tool in feeding and fitting show pigs, when fed correctly. FOLLOW ALL LABEL DIRECTIONS AS FAR AS MIXING AND BLENDING ANY COMPANIES PAYLEAN PRODUCT.

Pay lean works wonders in several situations. For weigh gain it is very good. Pigs will grow extremely fast when fed this This is one reason why I talk so strongly about holding pigs at the lighter weights before you are feeding Paylean. It is virtually impossible to feed Paylean and hold growth. It does not make sense.

Paylean will also add muscle and shape especially to the Loin, rump and ham area. I have always used a step up program with Pay lean and it has worked for us. We start slowly with about 2 grams for a week, just to see how the pig re-acts to the Pay lean. If we see no problems, we increase to 4.5 grams and so forth. It is also of utmost importance to feed at least 16% Protein and probably higher and added fat

at a higher level as it will really help reduce the stress that Pay lean can cause. **REMEMBER—FOLLOW ALL LABEL DIRECTIONS WHEN FEEDING PAYLEAN.**

OTHER TIPS

Walking pigs—I don't personally think you can walk your pig to much. 30 days before the show I tell all the families I work with to walk them daily until they think the pig has had enough—then go twenty more minutes. This will really help the stamina of the pig if you get into a situation where you are driving along time before the judge. Also, this will help your pig when you get to the show as it has been in and out of your pen at home and it will not be a strange situation.

Hair and Skin—Very important in the show ring. I think that clean dry bedding will allow your pig to have good skin. Daily brushing and grooming will help the hair be soft and when you clip, the hair will be manageable and clip up nicely. I really don't have any daily hair and skin product that is better than others—just use something daily and you will be fine. We spoke earlier about dark colored hogs needing sunlight and it is a must 30 days before the show to get them in the sun daily.

CLIPPING- This is very important and can make your hog look so much better presented. However, I think it very important that we go for a very natural look—as if you can't even tell they have been clipped. This is where the clean, dry bedding issue becomes so very important. Clipping should be done as close to your show date as possible, so the pig looks fresh, just as you do after a hair cut. The hair needs to be left at about one half inch over the body. The head, face and underline should be clipped much closer many people use different blade attachments and blend as they go. For instance, going from the head to the neck to the body would probably be 3 different attachments as to go from very short on the face, a touch more on the neck blending it into the shoulder and body leaving roughly a half inch of hair. I am the first one to admit—I am not very good at clipping and there are people that are masters at it. A rule of thumb—extreme patience will pay big dividends when you clip your pig. Remember—A **NATURAL LOOK.**

Water—One of the biggest problems I see at shows are pigs having to learn to drink out of a bucket or pan when all they have ever seen is a nipple water. About 2 weeks before the show we start watering the pigs out of a 2 gallon bucket, just to get them ready to drink from some different . I usually have the families add a can

of Ensure or Boost (VANILLA) Pigs really like it and it is a good product for them. Feeding should be done in something similar to what they have eaten out of at home. What we are trying to accomplish is changing very little of the pigs routine when we get to the show,

At the show, we normally feed several times a day in an attempt to keep the pig eating. I find that if you keep them just a little hungry they will always want to eat at the show and it is very important that they eat and stay full.

I am sure there are more things we could talk about and the above is a basic guide that has worked well for us. Many of you probably do some things different and that is fine—but there are a lot of new people every year that are just looking for some tips and hopefully we have accomplished some of this with this manual.

If you have any questions feel free to email me at eliteswineprogram@yahoo.com or call 816-284-2518 any time. We hope you find this information useful and helpful .WE DO HOPE YOU HAVE A GREAT TIME WITH PIG AND WISH YOU THE VERY BEST IN THE DAYS TO COME!!!!