



**Overview.** Approximately 34,000 barrows and gilts will be involved in the 4-H market swine project this year. This will involve over 26,000 4-H and FFA youth. Many hours will be devoted to the selection, daily care, and show preparation of each project. A successful market hog project involves a financial, time, and facilities commitment from the family.

**Questions to Ask.** To adequately address your needs when exhibiting market hogs, the following questions may need to be asked:

- What are the goals of the 4-H member and family?
- What shows or time of the year will you exhibit the project(s)?
- Will you need assistance in locating and selecting your project?

**Selection.**

Classification. Depending on each livestock show's rules, up to 10 different breeds may be classified. These may include Berkshire, Chester White, Duroc, Hampshire, Landrace, Poland China, Spot, Yorkshire, Dark Crossbred and Crossbred. Some shows combine two or more of the less popular breeds into various "Other Purebred" categories, also known as "OPB." County Extension Agents should become familiar with the Market Swine Classification Standards which were revised in 2006 (to include Dark Crossbred) and are printed in all major livestock show catalogs. A video describing the various standards is also available from the Texas Pork Producers Association. Show pig classification relies on both the genetic makeup and the physical characteristics of the animal such as color markings, physical structure, set to the ear, and breed character. When selecting a barrow or gilt for a market show, you should be well-versed in the rules of the show(s) in which the pig will be exhibited, the consequences of classing out, and be confident the barrow or gilt will classify into the breed you wish to show in. For instance, at the present time, any barrow classing out at San Antonio is sifted, while at many other shows, a barrow classing out is put into the appropriate weight class in the crossbred division.

*Refugio County Fair:* This show has only the following breed classifications: Hampshire, Duroc, Crossbred, and Other Pure Breeds.

Age and Weight of Market Hog. The current trend is for faster-growing hogs with plenty of rib shape and capacity. Most market hogs today are five and a half to six and a half months old when shown. All shows have minimum and maximum weight limits, and most have a weigh-back rule (either in pounds or a percentage of body weight). Exhibitors should become familiar with age and weight limit requirements. Many shows today require exhibitors to declare weights on market hogs instead of actually weighing them in, making knowledge about weigh-back rules even more important.

*Refugio County Fair:* Swine must meet a minimum weight of 225 lbs. and a maximum of 280 lbs. with a plus or minus 2 lbs. tolerance.

Quality Considerations. Other selection criteria include muscle, structural correctness, style and balance, and growth potential. Since current validation dates may require selection at an earlier age, consideration of recently weaned pigs may be necessary. Pigs that have recently been through the stress of weaning often are potbellied with a rough haircoat. Depending on the type of floor in the nursery, they may also be slightly tenderfooted. A trusting relationship with the breeder is essential. Because lameness in show pigs is so prevalent, it is important to select for soundness. Problems with feet and legs that are apparent when the pig weighs 80 pounds or less will most likely increase with age, size, weight and stress on the joints.

**Where to Purchase Pigs.** The trend is increasing for more and more pigs to be sold via private treaty, although some pigs are still sold through sales. Pigs will generally be between 40 and 75 pounds when purchased. While there may be more selection and variety at pig sales, buying off the farm allows the ability to see at least the sow and to visit with the breeder about genetics, vaccination schedule, etc. When setting up a visit to a breeder's farm, it is imperative to be on time (or at least call if you are running late), alert the breeder if you are visiting more than one hog farm that day (most will generally want you to wear disposable plastic boots or step through a foot bath), and always wait for the breeder before stepping into any barns or pens. If you need assistance contact your County Extension Agent.

**Validation.** Pigs must be state validated in the month of June for the State Fair of Texas and in the month of November for the major winter shows (Fort Worth, San Antonio, San Angelo, Austin, and Houston). Most county shows also require pigs to be validated, either with county or state tags. Tags for the State Fair of Texas are ordered the last of April and tags for the major winter shows are ordered the first of September through the County Extension Office. All pigs exhibited at the San Angelo Stock Show must have been bred and born in Texas and have Certified Texas Bred Registry certificate (CTBR).

*Refugio County Fair:* Validation occurs the 2nd Weekend in December, however please follow dates announced by the Extension Office.

**Facilities and Equipment.** Facilities need not be elaborate. The barn should have at least 20 square feet of space per pig, be well ventilated, well drained, and open to the south and/or east. It appears that a rectangular pen of at least eight feet wide and sixteen feet long would be sufficient. Shade is essential, especially with white pigs. Pigs should be kept cool during summer and warm during winter. Many exhibitors use fans and misters in the warm months, and heat lamps in the cooler months. Pigs may be kept on cement, dirt or wood flooring. While there are advantages and disadvantages to each, the pens should be kept clean regardless of flooring. Pigs can be destructive to equipment and facilities and care should be taken to avoid slippery flooring, sharp edges, etc. Portable feeders should be hung at the same height as the top of the shoulder of pigs being fed and cleaned daily. Most market hogs are individually housed to monitor feed consumption. Fresh water is the most important ingredient in feeding any type of livestock. Water troughs should be small so they can be drained and cleaned daily. If nipple waterers are used, flow should be checked on a regular basis. Other equipment needs may include a brush, show stick, pipe or whip, shovel, electric clippers with proper combs and cutters, syringes and needles, small portable feed trough, water bucket, show box, portable livestock scale, extension cord, heat lamp, and electric fan.

**Nutrition, Management and Exercise.** There are no magic feeds or diets that make champions. It is the total feeding program, including the feeding schedule, the exercise program, and the careful observation during the growing and finishing stages that makes a champion. The five basic nutrients are water, protein, carbohydrates and fats (energy), minerals and vitamins. County Extension Agents should recommend a balanced commercially prepared ration with a crude protein range of 16 to 20 percent. Do not constantly change rations and never make abrupt changes in the amount of feed being fed at each feeding. Pigs should consume between four and 6.5 lbs. of feed each day, usually split between at least two feedings. Pigs should be weighed on a regular basis (at least once a week) starting at about 125 pounds. Always weigh at the same time of the day to avoid variation due to feeding and watering. Calculate the average daily gain and project what the pig will weigh on show day before adjusting diets. Protein requirements decrease as the pig grows. Exercise builds up endurance, tones muscle, and requires the exhibitor to work with the pig. Exercising is not the same as practicing showmanship! Pigs should be walked several times a week for at least 20 minutes. Since pigs quickly learn the route and tend to race back to the pen, it is advantageous to change the route the pigs are walked often.

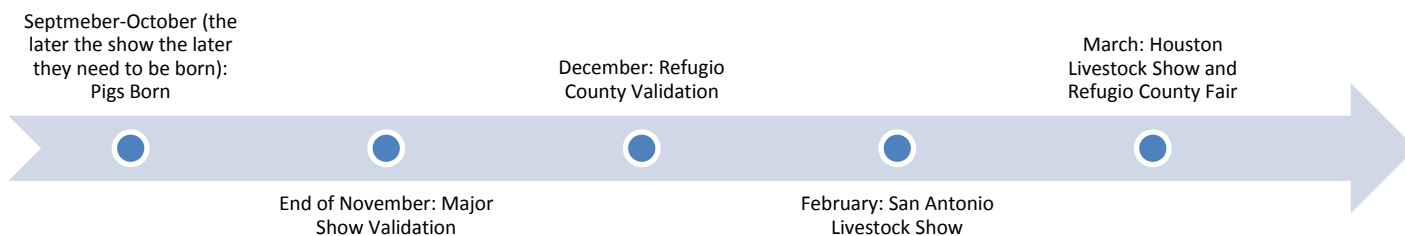
**Health.** The key to a healthy pig is the development of a preventative health program. It is a good to visit with the breeder to inquire about vaccination schedule. Erysipelas, atrophic rhinitis, circovirus, leptospirosis, and mycoplasma are a few viruses that should be vaccinated against and boosters may be required. Pigs should be dewormed monthly, rotating types of dewormers to prevent resistance. At least one rotation should include either Atguard® or Safeguard®, as these products are the only ones that treat whipworms. Ivermectin is an

injectable that also controls external parasites, such as lice and mange. County Extension Agents and exhibitors should utilize a local veterinarian to diagnose and treat diseases and develop a preventative health program. Pigs should be observed daily for signs of respiratory infection, diarrheal disease, and lameness. State and federal laws and regulations concerning the use of drugs for livestock are established to protect human and animal health. When administering drugs, always follow label instructions, including the withdrawal time before slaughter. The use of a drug in a manner other than stated on its label is regulated by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration and may be done only under the control of a licensed veterinarian. Feed labels cannot be altered by a producer or veterinarian and must be used according to the label. Most Texas livestock shows have strict policies against the illegal use of drugs and will disqualify animals if such drugs have been used, including those considered “performance enhancing,” which may include any drug that masks a symptom, including, but not limited to: dexamethazone, aspirin, etc.

**Fitting and Showing.** Skin care is also very important for show preparation. Most market shows are “water only,” which means that **only water** may be used for fitting pigs on show day. However, skin and hair care begins much earlier at home. Brushing should be started upon purchasing the pigs, at least twice a week and increasing to daily. This trains the hair to lie down, removes dry skin cells, increases the natural oil released by the hair follicle, and helps the pig become accustomed to being handled. There are many different products that may be used to condition the skin, which are acceptable to use **prior** to showing, while the exhibitor is working with his project at home. Oils may be used in the weeks prior to the show to condition the skin on colored hogs, but extreme caution must be used on white hogs. Never oil a white pig and leave it exposed to sunlight. In fact, white pigs should be kept well-shaded throughout the growing period. Approximately one week prior to the show, pigs should be clipped. The trend in recent years is to keep ½ to ¾ inch of length or longer on the hair, just taking the ends off. This can be accomplished by using a #1 or #2 guard on the clippers. Showmanship clinics should be conducted to teach proper showmanship techniques.

**Rules.** The Exhibitors’ Handbook contains the rules for a particular show. Each show is different and the rules change from year to year. Each year, take the time to review the rules of each show and keep a copy of the rules on hand while at the show. **Ignorance of the rules is not a valid excuse for breaking them.** One key section in all Exhibitors’ Handbooks is the “Animal Health Regulations.” Most major livestock shows (and some county shows) require a current set of health papers on an animal before entry onto the show grounds. Review the health requirements outlined in the Exhibitors’ Handbook at least a month before the show because some tests required by the Texas Animal Health Commission take a week or more to perform.

### ***Project Timeline:***



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October 2013

*Last Updated: 10/11/13*