

Raising a Few Pigs at Home

Raising a few pigs at home can be a rewarding family or 4-H youth project. To begin, feeder pigs are purchased as weaned piglets at 6-8 weeks old. They are raised to market weight, 200-250 pounds, at about 6 months of age. They should be healthy and in good condition when purchased. Characteristics to look for include; smooth hair coat, pink skin color and alertness. Feeder pigs should weigh about 40 pounds at purchase.

There are many breeds and crossbreeds of pigs. Each breed has its own characteristics. Historically pigs were bred for either lard or bacon production. Modern breeds focus on a long lean carcass with a high proportion of lean muscle to fat. When choosing your feeder pig select one that is larger than its litter mates, these growthy pigs tend to do better than the smaller 'runts'.

Housing

Before you bring a pig home have a place prepared to house your pig. Pigs need protection from the elements. In warm weather they need a place that is dry and protected from the sun. In cold weather pigs also need a dry place that is protected from the cold and wind. Size the pen to accommodate the pig as it grows. Pigs need enough space to move comfortably. Young pigs weighing 50 pounds need at least 4-6 square feet per pig. When they have reached market weight 200-250 pounds they need 10- 12 square feet of space each.

Pigs may be kept outside during warm weather. Fencing for pigs is an important consideration. You may use a permanent, 'hog-tight' woven wire fence with a board around the bottom to discourage digging, or you may use temporary moveable electric fencing systems if you train the pigs to it. A moveable fencing system allows you to use the pigs to clear and work a piece of land; they will get some of their feed from 'pasture', it will keep the pig pen from becoming muddy and reduce odors. If you keep pigs outside, be sure to provide protection from the sun, pigs have sweat glands on their snouts only and will sunburn and over heat quickly. What ever housing and fence system you use, make sure it is pig tight. Pigs are very intelligent animals, if there is a weak point in the pen, they will find it and they will get out. Catching pigs is not an easy task, especially right before you leave for work in the morning!

Water

A pig will drink 2-4 gallons of water a day. Clean, fresh water should be available at all times. There are many types of automatic waterers available, or you can simply provide a tub of water. Watering systems should be checked and cleaned regularly, especially during warm weather. If a water tub is provided secure it firmly as pigs will root under it and spill the contents.

Feed

Pigs are very susceptible to stress, changing location, being transported and leaving their litter mates can be very stressful. Try to limit the stress by planning ahead. To reduce stress for your new pigs, try to feed them the feed they are used to from their previous home for a few weeks. Introduce new feeds gradually mixing the feeds until the pigs adjust.

Young growing pigs need a well balanced diet that will supply the right amount of protein, energy, vitamins and minerals. The younger the pig the higher percentage protein is required. As the pig grows it requires less protein. Matching the diet to needs is important for healthy efficient growth. Premixed feeds are available that provide for the needs of pigs at various stages of growth. (they include; Starter, Grower and Finisher feeds) . While you can blend your own grains for pig feed, knowledge of ration balancing is required. It is seldom profitable to mix your own feeds.

Some people feed table scraps, garden waste and other food waste to pigs. While this can help to defray feed costs, it may still be necessary to use premixed feeds to insure the nutritional needs of the pig are met. If you choose to feed food waste to pigs, never feed them raw meat. Raw meat may carry disease organisms that will affect you and your pig. Federal Law requires any food wastes containing meat scraps (even cooked meat) must be cooked following specific guidelines, before it can be fed to pigs, or it will be illegal to sell the meat.

A good pig that is well cared for should gain 1-1/2 pounds per day.

Health

Internal parasites, such as round worms, must be controlled for the pig to grow and perform at its best. Young pigs are usually de-wormed about one week after weaning and twice more at 30 day intervals. It is important to read and follow the directions on the de-wormer label. Don't de-worm too close to market date because medication residues may remain in the meat. The package label will contain specific instructions in this matter. If you have questions or concerns consult your veterinarian.

External parasites, such as mange mites and lice, can be controlled with the application of approved pesticides, and by maintaining a clean environment.

Proper nutrition, sanitation, housing and management can prevent diseases that affect pigs. Preventative vaccines are also available; consult your veterinarian to establish a herd health program.

Management

Pigs will stay clean if you let them. They will designate an area for eating, sleeping and elimination of waste. If they are house inside leave a space free of bedding to be used for waste. In an outside pen, the pig will establish its own preferences.

Remove manure from pen daily and keep pen dry to reduce odors. Consider your neighbors when planning the location of your housing and manure storage areas. Keeping the manure storage area dry helps to reduce odors, consider covering manure to keep out rain. Composted pig manure makes an excellent addition to garden soils.

Market

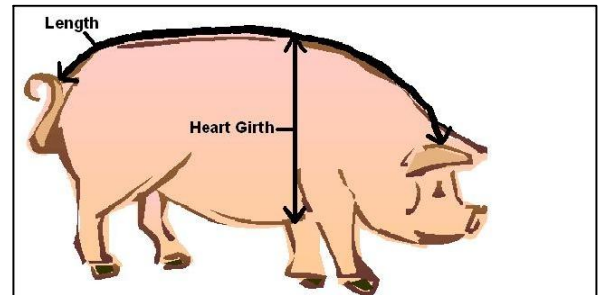
Pigs are ready for market when they reach a weight of 200-250 pounds. Keeping pigs beyond this weight decreases efficiency (it takes more feed per pound of gain) and increases the fat to lean ratio. It takes 5-7 months for a pig to reach market weight.

You can estimate the weight of your pig using the following method;

This is best done at feeding time; however a pig's head needs to be up to get the best measurement.

The Formula is $HG \times HG \times L / 400 = \text{WEIGHT}$

- 1) Measure the pig's heart girth (HG) right behind the front legs.
- 2) Measure between the ears to the base of the tail (L).
- 3) Multiply the heart girth measurement (HG) times itself, and then multiply that times the length measurement (L).
- 4) Now, divide that sum by 400. This is your approximate live weight.



If the pig is under 150 lbs. add seven pounds. If the pig is over 400 lbs. subtract 10 lbs for every 25 lbs.

Pigs may be sold at livestock auctions, or to individuals for fresh or freezer pork. Contact the slaughterhouse in advance to schedule an appointment; these facilities can be very busy during the fall months. Setting up an appointment will insure that your pig doesn't become over conditioned waiting for an appointment. Make sure to read and follow all label instructions regarding slaughter withholding times to avoid drug residues if you have used any medicated feed, de-wormers or other health products.

For more information on raising and purchasing pigs, or 4-H Swine projects in New Hampshire, please contact your local UNH Cooperative Extension Office <http://extension.unh.edu/> or the New Hampshire Pork Producers at: www.nhpork.org.

Original Fact Sheet written by; Gail McWilliam, former Extension Educator, with revisions by Dr. D.M. Kinsman, Professor Emeritus, UCONN Dept. of Animal Science and Dr. K.B. Kephart, Associate Professor of Animal Science, PENN State University

Revised and updated by Tina Savage, UNH Extension Educator Agricultural Resources and Environmental Stewardship 10/04.

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