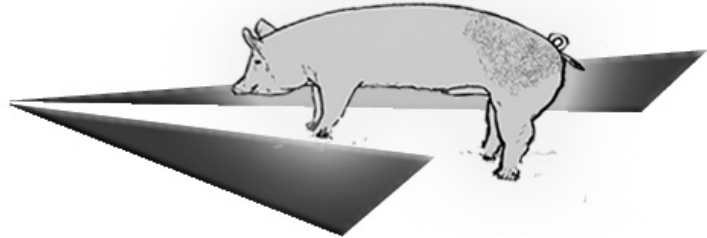




Texas Agricultural Extension Service
THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Starting Them Off RIGHT!!



GETTING YOUR NEWLY PURCHASED PIGS ON THE RIGHT TRACK

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As the weather gets thankfully cooler in Texas, its time for many to bring home the prospective class winners and champions for this year's project. Although selection of the "ideal" pig plays a major role in the overall success in the showring, even the ideal pig won't fare well without proper management.

Before you bring your pigs home, you should spend some time getting their pen ready. Regardless of whether they are to be housed inside or outside, on cement or dirt, some preparation is needed. Clean and disinfect all equipment (including feeders, show supplies, buckets and scales) as well as the housing itself with an animal-safe disinfectant. Don't forget the walls, ceiling, floors, cracks and crevices. A power sprayer works great but good old-fashioned elbow grease is even better. Cement is easier to clean and disinfect (from a disease organism standpoint) than wood or dirt. Make sure all surfaces and equipment are rinsed well to prevent any skin irritations from the disinfectant. Let the area dry and set for a few days before moving any pigs in.

If you already have pigs on your property, especially breeding animals, it is important to isolate the new animals for 60 days after arrival to prevent potential spread of any disease pathogens. Isolation means just that, *isolated* from other pigs (preferably at the edge of the property and downwind from the other pigs). Chores should be done here last and at the bare minimum boots should be disinfected in a footbath before and after feeding and caring for the new arrivals. If possible, have a separate set of boots and coveralls for use only in the isolation area to further prevent the spread of disease to your other animals.

Upon purchasing a pig you have started developing a relationship with the breeder. It is important that you have trust in and communicate with the breeder. Ask questions about

vaccinations and disease status in the herd. Dr. Bruce Lawhorn, Extension Swine Veterinarian, suggests that all pigs be vaccinated for erysipelas, actinobacillus (haemophilus) pleuroneumonia (APP) and PRRS (porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome) upon arrival, if not before. Other diseases that you may want protection against include transmissible gastroenteritis (TGE), influenza, salmonella cholerasuis and salmonella typhimurium. A number of vaccines are commercially available from your veterinarian. Just like in humans, immunity is not fully accomplished until a series of vaccinations are given. It will not be effective to give the first vaccine of a series without following through by giving all of the boosters. Transportation and introduction to new penmates, surroundings and pathogens (diseases) can stress the pigs, which can compromise the immune system and decrease feed intake and subsequently weight gain. Minimization of this stress by calm handling, proper transportation, plenty of clean, fresh water and a little extra attention to details will help prevent the setback in growth that can occur. Some people give an injection of antibiotics to prevent secondary respiratory infections to the pigs that are subjected to an unusual stress.

External and internal parasites should also be treated at this time. With pigs in confinement, these are not as common, but for pigs on pasture, it is important to deworm, delouse and demange. As with any animal health product, it is important to *read the label* and observe any withdrawal times prior to slaughter or, in the case of show pigs, sale of the animal.

If you purchased a boar, or a male pig that has not been castrated, it is time to get this done now. Castration at a young age (2-3 days of age in commercial situations) minimizes stress, blood loss, infection and possible growth lag. The younger, the better! The breeder may do this for you, or you may need to contact a veterinarian, especially as the pigs get older and bigger.

If you have nipple waterers, you may have to teach the new arrivals where to find them. Letting them run for a few days so that the water hits the ground, attracting the pigs to it, will help train your pigs quickly. The waterer can then be turned back to its proper setting.

The first feed that you feed your pig may be medicated, usually with chlortetracycline (CTC), oxytetracycline (Terramycin®) or lincomycin (Lincomix®). It is always important to read the feed labels so that you are aware of any withdrawal times. As far as nutrition goes, there are a number of very good feed companies around that sell feed especially formulated for the leaner genetics found in show pigs. Unless you have a problem during the feeding period, pick a company and stick with it through the growing phase. Most of these companies have nutritionists available to consult with you on when to switch diets and what and how much to feed during each phase of the growth cycle.

Observation during the first few days after arrival is vital! Check to make sure that your pigs are eating and drinking, and that you do not notice any lameness (possibly caused during transport) or respiratory distress (heavy breathing, coughing). If symptoms occur, consult your veterinarian immediately. Many problems become chronic if not treated immediately and can reduce the performance of the animal. Good herdsmen spend time

watching the animals and their behavior, and not just during feeding time. Twenty-four hours can make a big difference as far as treatment of a disease or bacterial infection.

Concentrating on the details, careful preparation and observation will help get your pigs – and you – off and running!