

FACT SHEET

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Handling Newly Purchased Feeder Pigs

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Purchasing Pigs

The first consideration in purchasing feeder pigs is to locate a dependable source of high-quality pigs. The ideal source would be from one or two individuals who could supply pigs consistently when needed. Disease risk escalates when pigs are purchased from several sources. Always purchase pigs from a reputable producer, market or marketing organization. Obtain as much information as possible concerning the history of the pigs and the farm of origin. Characteristics to look for in feeder pigs include

1. Health and thriftiness
2. Growthy, long-bodied, muscular conformation
3. Freedom from external parasites
4. Males castrated and healed
5. Weaned and eating from a feeder

Trucking

Transport pigs with care. Table 1 indicates the space required for various sized pigs. In hot weather, bed the truck with sand or sawdust and wet it down. In extreme heat, block ice can be used. In cold weather, bed the truck with straw and protect from drafts. Pigs can easily become overheated when subjected to the stress of marketing and hauling. This makes them susceptible to colds and pneumonia in cold weather.

Pigs should be grouped according to size and partitioned so that less than 50 pigs are in each section. Drive with caution; avoid sudden stops and turns.

Arrival on the Farm

Facilities and equipment to receive the pigs should be prepared well in advance. Feed should be mixed and medication should be ready for the water. Place newly purchased pigs in a clean, disinfected environment. Disinfectants quickly neutralize when applied to dirty or manure-covered floors. Apply cresylic acid, iodine or phenol derivative disinfectant to all surfaces and equipment. Remove feed left from previous pigs before filling feeders with "starter" ration.

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Table 1. Trucking space requirements per pig

Weight	Winter	Summer
40-50 lb.	1 sq. ft.	1 ¼ sq. ft.
50-75 lb.	1 ¼ sq. ft.	1 ½ sq. ft.
75-100 lb.	1 ½ sq. ft.	2 sq. ft.

Management Following Arrival

Isolate newly purchased pigs for 3 weeks. Provide warm, dry, draft-free quarters and adequate bedding in cool weather. Allow pigs to rest after the trip. Allow 4 to 6 square feet of floor space per pig up to 150 pounds. Keep pigs comfortable and cool during hot weather. Do not overcool or pneumonia may result.

Sort pigs by size into uniform lots. Allow one feeder hole space for each four to five pigs. More than five pigs per space decreases rate of gain, and less than four pigs per space increases feed wastage. Provide one waterer for each 20 to 25 pigs.

Medication following arrival is advisable since all newly received feeder pigs undergo a 2-week period of the shipping fever complex. Clinical signs of this complex may include depression, lack of appetite, excess coughing, thumpy breathing, elevated temperatures and occasional scours. How soon this complex strikes, the degree of severity and how long it will last may vary.

Add medication to the drinking water for the first 7 to 8 days following arrival. This will help prevent infection in the intestinal and respiratory tract. Follow your local veterinarian's recommendations.

Sulfathiazole and electrolytes or a combination of neomycin and terramycin, used as recommended, work well in breaking the shipping fever complex. Medication may be added through the use of proportioners on the water line of automatic waterers or placing troughs in the pens. Medication also should be added to the feed. Auero SP-250, neo-terramycin, tyran-sulfa and baciferm feed additives have successfully controlled diarrhea and pneumonia. Use them according to manufacturer's specifications in amounts varying from 100 to 250 grams of active ingredients per ton of complete ration.*

Starter Ration

The stomach of a starved, stressed pig usually cannot handle a high protein ration without nutritional scours developing.

Two methods exist for starting feeder pigs on feed. One is to start the pigs on a well-balanced, fortified and medicated 13 to 14 percent protein ration. The addition of a bulk factor such as rolled oats or wheat bran reduces the problem of gut edema and allows the pigs to eat free-choice from a self-feeder. After 7 to 10 days on the low protein ration, switch the pigs to a higher protein ration. Pigs under 40 pounds should receive 18 percent protein; pigs over 50 pounds should receive 16 percent protein. Pigs from 40 to 50 pounds should receive a 16 or 18 percent protein ration. It is better to gauge the time to change rations by the pigs' condition rather than by weight only.

Another method is to start the pigs on a well-balanced, fortified and medicated 16 to 18 percent protein ration. However, the pigs must be adjusted gradually to full-feed to prevent nutritional scours. For the first 3 to 5 days, this ration must be limit-fed or cut one-fourth with rolled oats or wheat bran and self-fed. Continued, low level feeding of antibiotics often has a beneficial effect until the pigs reach about 150 pounds.

In mixing your own pig feed, guard against anemia in newly purchased pigs by adding 2 pounds of ferrous sulfate per ton of feed for a few weeks. The addition of 1 pound of copper sulfate per ton of feed may have an antibacterial effect, but it should not be used if a lagoon system is employed.

Parasite Control

Worm feeder pigs on day of receipt or 2½ weeks later. Worming between these dates is not recommended because it may complicate the shipping fever problem. Worm pigs with dichlorvos, piperazine or Tramisol. Heavily infested pigs should be re-treated after 4 weeks to kill worms that were migrating during the first treatment.

Treat pigs with a lice and mange control spray 3 weeks after arrival and when the weather is favorable. Never pick a windy, cold day to spray pigs. (More information on control of internal and external parasites is available from your county

*Each of the aforementioned products should be checked to see that they have not been removed from the approved FDA list of animal drugs and chemicals.

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agricultural agent. Ask for MP-718, "Parasitic Diseases of Swine," and MP-691, "Texas Guide for Controlling External Parasites of Livestock and Poultry.")

Tail-Biting

Tail-biting is a problem that often occurs when pigs are finished in confinement. Many possible causes have been suggested, but no primary cause has been identified. Stress, poor nutrition and boredom appear to precipitate the problem.

The following management is recommended to avoid stress and help curb tail-biting.

1. Provide adequate pen, feeder and watering space.
2. Keep the pen as dry as possible.
3. Feed a well-balanced, fortified ration with adequate protein.

The boredom factor may be reduced by allowing pigs to play with such objects as chains, tires, boards or bowling balls.

Providing free-choice mineral, free-choice dirt or free-choice hay has also been credited with stopping tail biting. Docking the pigs' tails about 1 inch from the base may be necessary to prevent tail-biting.

Management of newly purchased feeder pigs is critical, particularly during the first 2 weeks following arrival. Pigs require comfortable quarters, adequate nutrition, disease and parasite control and close supervision. Death losses above 2 percent result in undesirable profit margins. If health problems should occur, call your veterinarian.

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