

FACT SHEET

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PRODUCING FEEDER PIGS IN TEXAS

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The demand for top quality feeder pigs in Texas far exceeds the supply. From 1970 to 1973 a large percentage of the finished pigs sold were purchased as feeder pigs. Interest has developed to the point where specialized feeder pig markets are operating successfully throughout Texas.

There are several advantages of raising feeder pigs as compared with a farrow-to-finish operation.

- There is a more rapid turnover in the volume of pigs than can be handled each year. About 6 months are required from the time sows are bred until feeder pigs are sold. In a farrow-to-finish operation this time is increased by about 4 months, for a total of 10 months before income is realized.
- Less operating capital is required for feeder pig production. The total cost of producing a feeder pig is about one-third that of a 220-pound slaughter hog.
- Feeder pig production fits well into grain deficit areas. The amount of grain required to maintain a brood sow and raise a litter of pigs to 40 pounds is about 20 to 25 percent of the amount required to feed them to a market weight of 220 pounds.
- Feeder pig production allows farmers to use efficiently a maximum amount of labor. On many farms the seasonal labor requirements in the normal crop and livestock programs leaves periods where excess labor is available. Some smaller farms do not provide full-time employment at any time during the year. A feeder pig business can fit into many operations and use labor that might not otherwise be used profitably.

The breeding herd also will make the best use of any available pasture. In some areas the amount of available pasture land is not sufficient to maintain a cattle or sheep enterprise of economic size, but is sufficient to permit pasturing of a profitable sow herd.

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Production efficiency greatly affects profits made from feeder pigs. Efficiency depends upon good breeding, feeding, management, disease control and marketing. A person's ability for handling swine must be better than average to cope with the specialized nature of producing feeder pigs. Producing large litters of high-quality pigs that are free from disease and parasites and are uniform in type and size is essential for a successful feeder pig business.

BREEDING PROGRAM

The number and quality of pigs farrowed and weaned can be increased if breeding stock is selected with care. When choosing a breeding program consider some of the advantages of crossbreeding. Crossbreeding improves pig performance from birth to weaning. Crossbred sows usually farrow and wean larger litters than purebred sows. Crossbred pigs have greater endurance, strength, and ability to live and grow; thus, they are heavier at weaning.

To maintain high performance from weaning to market, new breeding stock must be superior in carcass traits and post-weaning gains because crossbreeding has little effect on these traits.

The need to use superior boars in a crossbreeding program cannot be over-emphasized. Since each pig raised receives half of its genes from each parent, and in turn transmits half to its offspring, genetic makeup of the foundation sow herd is rapidly diluted in succeeding generations.

A simple crossbreeding system involves rotating boars of three different breeds. For example, a Hampshire boar might be used for the first mating. Then a Yorkshire boar might be mated to the daughters of the Hampshire boar. The third boar used could be a Duroc mated to the daughters of the Yorkshire boar. (For more information on crossbreeding see L-728, *Crossbreeding for Commercial Pork Production*, Texas Agricultural Extension Service.)

BREEDING MANAGEMENT

Proper management during the breeding season is important in order to obtain a high conception rate and large litters of healthy pigs.

Care of the Boar

In many cases, the boar is the most abused member of the swine herd. He should be kept away from the sow herd in a large lot or pasture where water and minerals are available at all times. Boars need adequate exercise, sunlight and a balanced ration to stay in good health and proper condition. A service-age boar should be fed 3 to 4 pounds per day of a 16 percent protein ration during the non-breeding season. The amount should be increased to 6 to 8 pounds some 10 to 12 days prior to breeding, and maintained at this level throughout the breeding. A boar should never be allowed to get too fat or too thin, but should be kept in a lean condition. Exercise can be forced by placing feed and water away from the sleeping quarters.

If possible, the entire sow herd should be hand-mated. More sows can be mated to a boar during the breeding season by hand-mating than by pen-mating. Mature boars (18 months or older) can be used three times per day for short periods of time. Younger boars should be used less.

Vaccinate boars for erysipelas and leptospirosis every 6 months, if these diseases are prevalent in the area.

Care of the Gilts

Gilts should be selected at 180 to 240 pounds and developed until at least 8 months of age before they are bred. Older gilts produce larger litters of stronger, healthier pigs. Sows and gilts normally come into heat every 19 to 21 days with the heat period lasting 2 to 3 days. They should be bred twice, with 12 to 24 hours between services if hand-mating is practiced. However, if only one service is given, breed gilts 24 hours after the first sign of heat is detected.

Starting 2 weeks before the breeding season, flush the gilts by full-feeding (7 to 8 pounds per head per day) a well-balanced, fortified ration.

Management During Gestation

During the gestation period, sows should be fed to gain 50 to 65 pounds. To help control gains separate gilts from the older sows, especially in dry-lot. Gilts and sows may be hand-fed or self-fed for 6 to 8 hours every third day. A little more feed may be required for self-feeding, but less labor is involved.

Shelter and equipment during gestation can be relatively simple. During the winter allow bred sows 16 to 20 square feet of dry, draft-free shelter per head. During the summer, allow 18 to 20 square feet of shade per head. (For further information about breeding, gestation and farrowing management, see L-1024, *Swine Management — A Basic Guide*, Texas Agricultural Extension Service.)



Feeder pig production makes excellent use of natural or improved pastures, and low cost facilities.



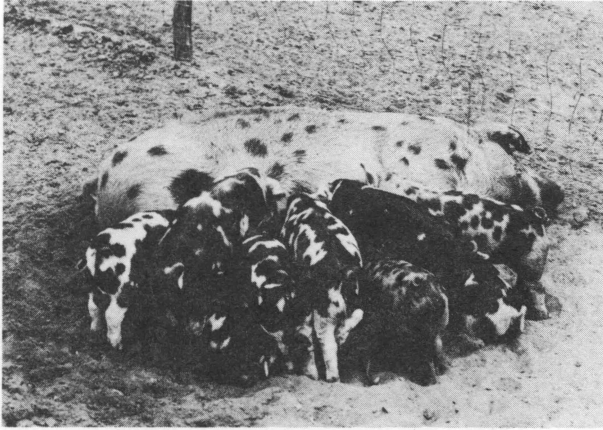
These crossbred pigs are ready for the feeder pig market.

SOW AND LITTER CARE

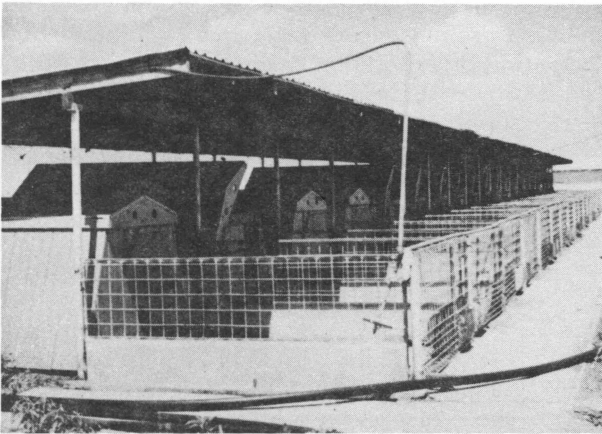
There is no substitute for swine sanitation. Effective sanitation measures start before farrowing, and thorough cleaning and disinfecting are essential.

The sow should be washed with soap and water to remove dirt and worm eggs, and moved to the farrowing house 2 to 3 days before farrowing.

It is usually time well spent to be with the sow when she farrows. The approximate farrowing date can be determined by keeping accurate breeding records, since pigs are born about 112 to 115 days after the sow is bred. Newborn pigs should be dried off with a sack or cloth to prevent chilling, and it might also be necessary to provide heat lamps or gas-fed brooders. It is important that all newborn pigs find a teat and begin nursing soon after farrowing. Antibodies in the colostrum or first milk help protect the pig from disease and infection.



Crossbred pigs are heavier at weaning than purebred pigs.



Modern farrowing facilities, such as this one, have moderately low cost, labor saving, individual sow units.

If several sows farrow within a 48-hour period, transfer pigs so all the sows have about the same number. This gives the pigs a better chance to survive and reduces the possibility of runts.

Pigs should be ear-notched, have their needle teeth clipped, tails docked, and navels and naval stubs treated with tincture of iodine shortly after birth.

Nutritional anemia can be prevented by providing a source of supplemental iron for pigs on or before the third day of age.

Creep feed should be made available to the pigs 7 to 10 days after birth. An 18 percent protein starter should be made available to the pigs when they attempt to eat with the sow. Castrate male pigs before 2 weeks of age and wean pigs at 35 to 42 days of age.

DISEASE AND PARASITE CONTROL

Sanitation, which will help control diseases and parasites, is necessary for profitable swine raising. Sanitary measures and good husbandry are synonymous, both as a means of growing healthier swine and increasing the net farm income. If buildings, pens and premises are kept clean and sanitary and disease-producing organisms are kept away, most diseases and parasites cannot develop.

Water fountains should be located close to drains or over slats. Self-cleaning waterers can help to avoid bacterial buildup. A swine unit should be fenced to reduce traffic and there should be an effective control program for rodents, birds and flies. Isolation quarters should be provided for crippled, diseased or replacement animals. Foot baths containing disinfectant should be provided at building entrances. (For a detailed review of disease prevention and parasite control see L-993, *Swine Herd Health*, Texas Agricultural Extension Service.)

MARKETING FEEDER PIGS

There are three major methods of marketing feeder pigs: (1) farmer-to-farmer sales; (2) special feeder pig sales; and (3) contract feeder pig marketing.

- *Farmer-to-farmer sales.* There is no data to accurately state how many or what proportion of feeder pigs in Texas are sold on the basis of private treaties. However, there is good reason to believe that more pigs are sold by this method than by any other. Because pigs are moved directly from one farm to another, mixing pigs from more than one farm is avoided and the chances of spreading disease are reduced. Where two farmers can work out a satisfactory negotiation on price, quantity and weight, this method can provide an assured supply for the buyer, while the producer is assured of a steady market.

The method of farmer-to-farmer sales does have disadvantages. For example, if a disease outbreak affects either the buyer's or seller's hogs the production and marketing schedule is thrown off. Furthermore, extreme price variation usually leads to dissatisfaction on the part of at least one of the parties—particularly if the extreme prices last beyond two marketing periods.

- *Special feeder pig sales.* Cooperative feeder pig auctions have been developed under the leadership of local swine producers and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. These sales have become a desirable and effective system for the marketing of feeder pigs in the central, eastern and western areas of Texas. By scheduling special feeder pig sales on a regular basis throughout the year, producers are assured of a competitive market and are encouraged to produce high quality pigs. (Your county Extension agent-agriculture, or the authors of this publication, can give you the location and dates of the feeder pig sales currently operating in Texas.)

Under this program, all pigs are moved directly from the farm to the cooperating auction market where they must pass a rigid inspection by experienced graders before they can be sold. Pigs are sorted and penned according to weight and quality and sold as a group.

All pigs of inferior quality, such as uncastrated boar pigs or unhealed castrates, pigs with ruptures or malformations and all pigs in an unthrifty condition, are classed as rejects and sold "as is" at the end of each regularly scheduled sale.

These special feeder pig auctions provide an outlet for the producer with a small number of pigs and assure him of a market which reflects the current local value of his pigs.

• *Contract feeder pig marketing.* Producing and marketing feeder pigs by special contractual agreement has become increasingly popular in some areas of the United States, particularly in the corn belt states.

Contact feeder pig marketing involves a contract between a feeder pig producer and a marketing organization. The marketing organization may be a private corporation or a cooperative corporation. Many feeder pig producers hold supply contracts directly with feeders, furnishing to the feeders all marketable pigs they produce. The producer agrees to market all of his pigs through the organization. In return, the organization furnishes field service on production problems, secures a market for the pigs, provides facilities for weighing and assembling, and delivers the pigs to buyers from the assembly point. The organization also sorts the pigs into uniform lots prior to delivery. Pigs are rejected that are undesirable according to standards of thrift, type and soundness. The organization deducts a set fee from the sale price of the pigs for the services it performs.

WHAT'S AHEAD

The demand for top quality feeder pigs during the past few years has been increasing. Indications are that this trend will continue with larger, more specialized units. Feeder pigs will be produced on one farm and then finished to market weight on another farm.

Feeder pig production fits well on small to medium-sized farms and part-time farmers can produce feeder pigs with a low investment.

The keys to success in this venture include the managerial ability of the operator, good breeding stock, an effective marketing system and a market prearrangement to generate needed finances.

Readers desiring additional information on swine production may obtain copies of the following publications from their county Extension agent-agriculture, or by writing the authors of this publication.

- MP-953 *Keys to Profitable Swine Production*
- L-706 *External Parasites Attacking Swine in Texas*
- L-728 *Crossbreeding for Commercial Pork Production*
- L-992 *Buying and Handling Feed for Pork Production*
- L-993 *Swine Herd Health*
- L-1024 *Swine Management — A Basic Guide*
- L-1052 *Handling Newly Purchased Feeder Pigs*
- B-992 *Selecting Meatier Hogs*
- MP-1128 *Liquid Manure Management for Swine*
- MP-691 *Suggestions for Controlling External Parasites of Livestock and Poultry*

TIPS FOR PRODUCERS SELLING FEEDER PIGS

Regardless of the method of marketing used, a producer must pay close attention to his sales program. While the tips listed below do not guarantee success in selling feeder pigs, many producers and marketing organizations have found them useful.

1. Strive to build a reputation as an honest supplier of high quality feeder pigs. A good reputation goes a long way toward building repeat sales which lower your selling cost.
2. Arrange farrowing to permit sales of pigs several times per year to help level out price variations and volume peaks.
3. Sort pigs properly into groups of uniform size and quality. Well-sorted pigs command a higher price than do unsorted ones.
4. Have pigs clean and "looking their best" when they are shown to a prospective buyer.
5. Whenever possible, follow up on performance of your pigs for several weeks after buyer has them on feed.
6. Price pigs realistically. Price pigs according to present day market. Do not overprice or underprice.
7. Castrate boar pigs well in advance of sale date.
8. Express your willingness to buyers to furnish them with a herd health and inspection statement from your local veterinarian. Such a statement helps build confidence in your honesty and ability to supply good pigs.
9. When deemed advisable, furnish your buyer written recommendations on handling feeder pigs for the first few days after arrival at his farm.
10. Assist your buyer in arranging transportation of pigs to his farm.

These tips were taken from C-349, *Producing and Marketing Feeder Pigs*, Kansas Cooperative Extension Service.

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