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NF93-113 Proper Way to Ear Notch Pigs

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NebFact



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Proper Way to Ear Notch Pigs

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One basic task involved in the 4-H Swine Project that continually provides difficulty to many 4-H members, leaders and parents is properly ear notching project pigs. While for some this is a matter-of-fact task, others have great difficulty understanding the purpose or practice of notching. This NebFact has been written for use as a guide in notching pigs, as well as a reference piece for a 4-H club meeting lesson.

The first item to be discussed is the reason for ear notching.

Notching provides:

1. A permanent ID system
2. Individual identity for all animals
3. Inexpensive means of identification

Time for notching is an important factor. If pigs can be notched when their tails are docked, or at 1-3 days old, the task is much easier. If you allow pigs to become large (100 lbs), the task can become considerably demanding mentally and physically.

If notching ears on older or larger pigs, it may be necessary to house them in separate pens until the notches heal. Pen mates not notched may be attracted to the bloody notches and start ear biting.

The equipment needed to safely notch is limited to primarily the notchers and some disinfectant to dip it in. In some cases, spraying larger pigs with a wound dressing can be helpful.

Small notchers typically make a notch that is 3/16 to 1/4 inch deep. This is the preferable size for pigs under 25 pounds. For larger pigs, a notcher that makes notches 1/2 inch deep is recommended. Avoid making notches too shallow, as they may become hard to read or possibly heal shut.

Leave at least 1/4 inch between notches, and avoid making notches too close to the head.

The key to successfully notching pigs lies in putting the notches in the right locations. It is also essential to notch each pig differently. To notch pigs properly, one must know the identity of each notch and its proper location. As noted in Figure 1, the right ear designates litter number, while the left ear indicates pig number.

The right ear has five locations for notches, each assigned various numbers, either 1, 3, 81, 9 or 27. Except for the 81 notch, there may be one or two notches at each of the other four locations. To determine the litter number for a pig, the numerical values assigned each notch are added.

Examples:

$$\text{Litter No.} = 1+3+3+27=34$$



$$\text{Litter No.} = 1+1+81+9=92$$



The notches on the left ear indicates pig number. There are three locations for these notches, and their numerical values are 1, 3 and 9. As with litter number, the number values are added.

Examples:



Fig No. = 1+1+3+9 = 14

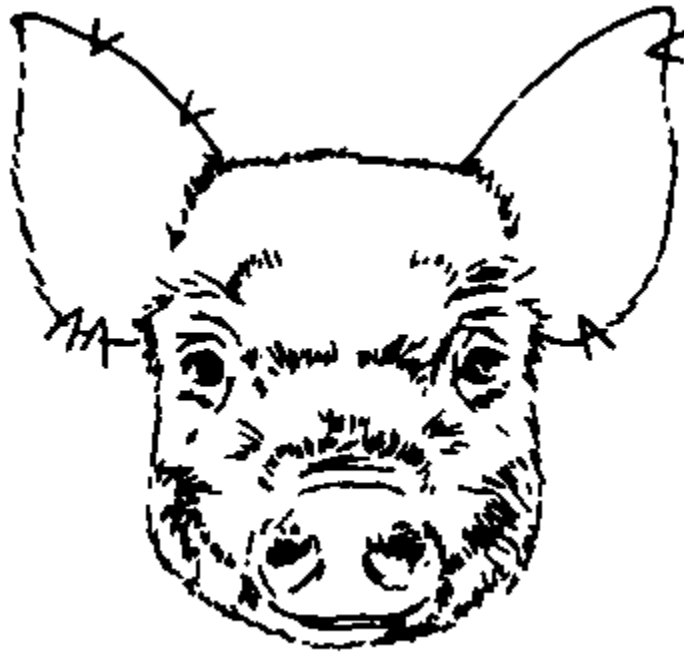


Pig No. = $1+3+3 = 7$

Avoid putting a notch midway in the outside edge of either ear. Such marks can easily be mistaken for either a 1 or a 3.

Combining Both Ear

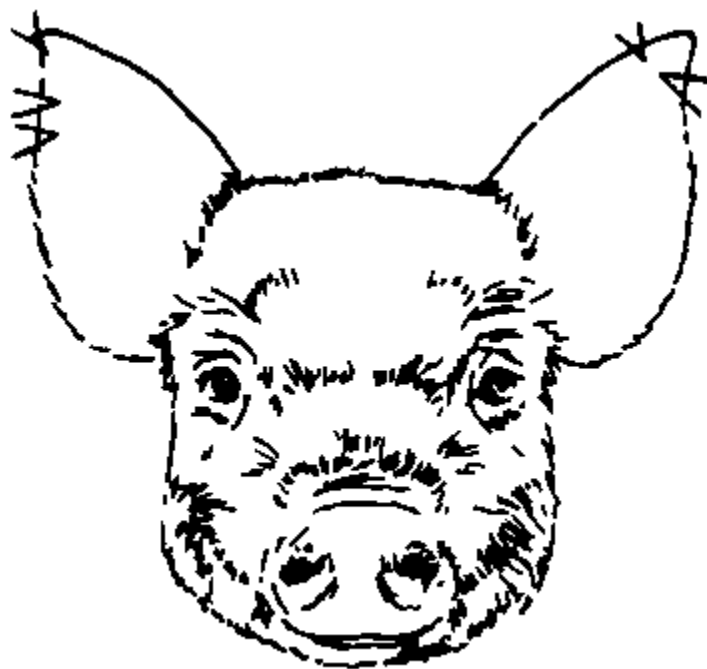
Example:



Litter No. $1+1+9+27 = 38$

Pig No. $1+3 = 4$

Example:



Litter No. $3+3+81 = 87$

Pig No. $3+9 = 12$

Comments to Consider

It is easier for both the person doing the notching and the pig if the process when the pig is very young. Preferably, pigs are notched during their first week of life.

When combining ear notching with other pig processing, consider doing the notching last, as it tends to cause more bleeding than other procedures, such as teeth clipping, naval care, injections or tail docking.

Remember, the reference to left and right ear refers to the pig's left or right ear, as viewed from the rear of the pig. Left and right does not refer to the viewers left or right.

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