



Raising Pigs at Home

Raising a few pigs at home can be a rewarding family or 4-H youth project. To begin, you will want to purchase feeder pigs as weaned piglets at six to eight weeks old. They are raised to market weight, 200-250 pounds, at about 6 months of age. Look for healthy pigs with a smooth hair coat, pink skin color and alertness. Feeder pigs should weigh about 40 pounds at purchase. Buy either females or castrated males.

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 larger pigs tend to do better than the smaller 'runts.'

Housing

Before you bring a pig home, have a place prepared to house it. 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 four to six square feet per pig. When they have reached market weight of 200-250 pounds, they need 10-12 square feet of space each. (For more information on swine housing, please refer to the UNH Cooperative Extension fact sheet Housing and Space Guidelines for Livestock.)

You may keep pigs 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 overheat quickly.

Whatever 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 two to four gallons of water a day. Make sure to keep clean, fresh water available at all times. Although there are many types of mechanical and automatic waterers available, you can simply provide a tub of water. Check and clean your watering system regularly, especially during warm weather. If you provide a water tub, secure it firmly as pigs will root under it and spill the contents.

Feed

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

A well cared-for pig should gain a pound to a pound-and-a-half per day. 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. These include Starter, Grower and Finisher feeds. While you can blend your own grains for pig feed, you may not find it profitable, since it requires detailed knowledge of ration balancing.

Some people feed table scraps, garden waste and other food waste to pigs. While this can help defray feed costs, you may still need to include premixed feeds to make sure you meet the nutritional needs of your pig. If you choose to feed food waste to pigs, never feed them raw meat. Raw meat may carry disease organisms that could 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.

Health

Internal parasites, such as roundworms, 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.

You can control external parasites such as mange mites and lice with applications 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 housed inside, provide a raised-bed area for loafing and a space free of bedding to be used for waste. In an outside pen, the pig will establish its own preferences.

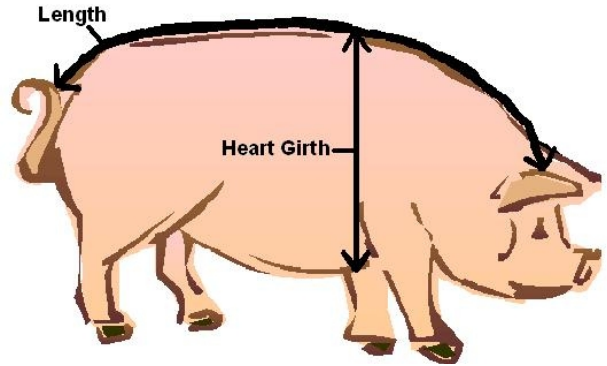
Remove manure from the pen daily and keep the pen dry to reduce odors. Consider your neighbors when planning the location of your housing and manure storage areas. Keeping the manure storage area dry helps to reduce odors. Consider covering the manure to keep out rain. Composted pig manure makes an excellent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

Market

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

Use the following formula to estimate the weight of your pig: $HG \times HG \times L / 400 = \text{weight}$

1. Measure the pig's heart girth (HG) all the way around the pig just behind the front legs.
2. Measure between the ears to the base of the tail (L).
3. Multiply the heart girth measurement (HG) by itself, then multiply that answer by the length measurement (L).
4. Now divide the total by 400. This is your approximate live weight.



If the pig weighs less than 150 pounds, add seven pounds. If the pig is over 400 pounds, subtract 10 pounds for every 25 pounds the pig weighs. To prepare to get your pig to the slaughterhouse, make provisions for extra help and access to a truck or trailer. Load your pig into a covered truck body with a chute (ramp with wipers). You can also drive it into a pig crate and use several people to carry the crate onto the truck body. This can be messy and dangerous. It helps to use a wood panel to guide the pig in the direction you want it to go.

You can sell your pig(s) 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 while waiting for an appointment. If you have used any medicated feed, de-wormers or other health products, make sure to read and follow all instructions on the product labels regarding slaughter withholding times to avoid contaminating the meat with drug residues.

For more information on raising and purchasing pigs in New Hampshire contact your local UNH Cooperative Extension office or the New Hampshire Pork Producers Council, at 47 Dunlap Road, Danbury, New Hampshire 03230. You can get information on 4-H swine projects from your local UNH Cooperative Extension Office.

*Original Fact Sheet by Gail McWilliam, former UNH 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 UNH Extension Educator Tina Savage,

Visit our website: ceinfo.unh.edu

UNH Cooperative Extension programs and policies are consistent with pertinent Federal and State laws and regulations on non-discrimination regarding age, color, handicap, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veterans status.