

# Swine Project Basics

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**Nutrition** There are a lot of good options out there. Keep in mind your own financial situation regarding selecting a feed. Most commercial rations are balanced to give the animal what it needs during the specific stage of growth. The diet provides adequate amounts of energy, protein, vitamins and minerals according to the amount the animal will eat each day. These are referred to as complete feeds. It is better to use a complete feed than to over feed protein, which can be expensive and causes the animal to use the excess protein as added energy or store it as fat. Water is the most important and essential of all nutrients. Fresh, clean water should never be withheld from the animal. Lack of water harms the animal's health and also causes muscles to lose shape and expression, because muscle is made up mostly of water. If you use nipple waterers, check them often to make sure the flow rate is correct. Keep in mind that valve waterers or nipple waterers work best for hogs.

**Feeding** Everyone in the show industry knows someone that feeds their animals in a different way than you do. From my experience the best feeding regimen is to feed twice a day, morning and night. Different schedules require different things, but monitoring the feed distribution and consumption is the best practice. This way you will notice if appetites change or how much feed is actually getting wasted on the ground. A pig can gain two pounds a day. Depending on the weight of your pig when you get it home, when you are going to start its show diet, and the days until the show day/weigh in, it is simple to estimate how much feed you will need and how much to feed each day. If you start with a fifty pound hog and the show/weigh in is in 120 days and you would like your hog to weigh 275 (which is ideal) you will need your hog to gain 225 pounds in 120 days. Therefore, your pig needs to gain 1.875 pounds a day. This means you should feed your hog 5-6 pounds of feed a day, or 2.5 pounds a feeding. Keep in mind your pig's appetite and monitor if the weather changes their appetite will as well. If you have a good week or two of really cool weather and your pig is still hungry after the 5 pounds a day take advantage of that and feed 6, because more than likely it will get hot and their appetite will go down. It is always easier to hold a pig for a couple days than it is to try to push them to weigh more. This is when specialty products can aid as well. Also, remember that if your show season is in the summer and the weather is hot you should exercise and feed your hog early in the morning when it is still cool and later in the evening when it's cooling down.

**Daily Exercise and Maintenance** Start at least 3 months before the show. I understand sometimes school is still in session, but it is important to start to exercise your show pigs. It is ok to walk your pigs once a day. It is ideal to walk your hog twice a day; once in the morning when it's cool and again at night when it's cool. I suggest walking them 1/2 mile to start and work them up from there. As most pigs have been sitting in their pens for a month or two it is best to start their workout slow. I found it best to walk them before you feed them. The pigs will develop a routine and make the exercise easier because they know they are getting rewarded with feed afterwards. Exercise helps loosen their joints and keep them sound.

Once you feed them I suggest brushing or rubbing in show sheen. You can use any kind of skin conditioner you prefer, but test it on a small part of the skin first to make sure it does irritate your hog's skin. If you notice your pig has dry scaly skin now I suggest brushing in the skin conditioner twice a day, otherwise once a day is fine. This will help with moisturization and preparing your hog for that show day look. TIP: If you have a light skinned hog a good moisturizing sunscreen would be great to prevent sunburn while exercising. Take advantage of the walking and practice showing your hog as well. When exercising the hogs start or finish with a good 10-20 minutes of pure showing. The longer you can practice showing your hog the more used to it the hog will get. Showmanship classes can go on for a really long time at shows, take that into account, the longer you practice the longer you will be able to show your hog before it gets tired or refuses to do what you want. Practicing this will help you and possibly get you that purple ribbon.