

Lincoln/East Adams County Weekly 4-H Article



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Article IV

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Swine Showmanship (Part I)

Overview

I am definitely a beef cattle judge, however, I have judged and witnessed many swine shows and judging classes over the years to know that even though, watching hogs being driven from outside the ring looks easy, it can be challenging from inside the ring as a showman.

There are certain basics in showing swine that even the youngest showman can work to achieve. While these ideas may seem to be very detailed, they are the keys to making the showmanship experience as positive as it can be. Always keep in mind while you prepare for your showmanship that a judge is looking to be impressed in the show ring. If you want to be competitive, you will need to take the steps to develop a program for success!



The purpose of showing is to present an animal to a judge in the best manner possible so the judge can evaluate the animal thoroughly. With this in mind your hog must be presented in the ring so that the judge can view them from all angles; front, rear and side or profile. It is critical to your showing success that you keep your hog moving at the right speed, with their head up, and at the right distance from the evaluator. DO NOT make the mistake of having your hog too close for the judge to actually SEE them and evaluate its merit. An exhibitor should try just as hard to show an animal well during regular judging/market class as during a showmanship class. The only difference between a regular showing and a showmanship class is that the relative merit of the animal is not under consideration during a showmanship class. A good exhibitor keeps the pig under control at all times. This is difficult because a pig is not held or restrained like other animals, and different training procedures are followed.

Training Your Hog

Training a pig begins in advance of show time. The best way to do this is to begin walking the pig one to two months before show time, getting it used to you and your commands.

Tips to exercising:

- Exercising increases the pig's metabolism rate.
- Exercising builds the respiratory system so they do not tire and get as warm when driven at the show.

- Generally, you can start routinely exercising your pig when it reaches 150 lbs.
- In the beginning, exercise one to two times per week for 10 to 15 minutes.
- You should drive the pig like you would in the show ring. DO NOT do anything to the pig that you would not do in the show ring.
- Do not chase, yell or do anything to scare your pig when exercising.
- Exercising helps the pig loosen its joints and makes the pig “feel better.”
- Halt exercising your pig if it is sick, lame, or injured.

You also can practice giving the pig commands with your stick. Pigs are generally quite smart and will look forward to their exercise session and will “enjoy” you showing them. Try to avoid making a “pet” out of them, however. Disciplined training with the stick is critical to your eventual success in the show ring.



Washing...

It is best to wash your hog a few times before the show. Start a couple weeks before the show and do the last washing after you arrive at the show. It usually requires more than one washing to remove all the dirt and dandruff from the pig. The animal’s hair coat will show more bloom if you begin brushing the pig prior to show time. Brushing also will help gentle the animal. Brush the hair coat in its normal direction.

Clipping...

Clipping is a tool used to help trim the long hairs of a pig to help give it a fresher, more attractive look. Clipping also helps to improve the muscle shape of pigs by removing long hairs that cover up the natural curves on a pig. ATTENTION: Before you do any body clipping it is critical that you check the show rules and follow them on allowable body hair length.

Tips to Clipping:

- Clipping, when done correctly, can enhance the appearance of your pig, but when done incorrectly, it can make your pig look unattractive.
- Clipping should be done **one or two days before going to your show**. Use a guard that leaves a minimum of **1/2”** of hair. Because each brand of clipper blades may have a different name for the various sizes, please check to make sure you have a clipper guard that meets this minimum length before you start clipping.
- NEVER shave the hair off a pig – market purchasers can refuse these pigs due to the short hair length and it also makes your pig look very unattractive.
- Start clipping from the rear of the pig moving your clippers up and forward, which will be against the grain (lay) of the hair.
- Be sure to clip all long hairs – this includes legs, belly, the entire underneath of the pig, as well as tail, ears and face. NEVER use a smaller guard to clip the top of your pig than what you used on the side of the pig as it causes unevenness that is unattractive.

- When clipping the tail, use your guard to clip the hair on the bottom 2/3 of the tail, and then just trim the long hairs on the end of the tail. You do not want to trim the hair all the way down the tail so when the pig curls its tail it will look natural. If you have a red hog, do not do a dramatic difference in guard width, as the hair clipped at different lengths will have contrasting red colors.
- **NEVER** clip your pig at the show. This practice is to be done at home prior to leaving. Failure to make time to prepare properly at home is not an excuse to clip the pig at the show.

Generally, you can clip the body of your pig while it is eating and unrestrained. However, to restrain your hog to clip the head and face, use a soft rope that has a loop on the end. If you use a regular hog snare, place duct tape over the cable wire so the nose does not get scratched.

When you are done, brush off clipped hair and apply a light coat of oil.

Prior to clipping - It is important that you have been applying some baby oil or similar oil based product for several days prior to clipping so the hair is soft and will trim easily. Also, if the hair is hard after clipping, it will stand up and not lay down nicely (i.e. your pig will look like a porcupine!).

To give a pig a glossy hair coat, apply transparent oil to darker hogs. Never leave a large amount of oil on the pig. The best way to apply oil is to soak a rag and rub it over the pig. If too much oil is applied, take a dry rag and rub some off. White pigs and white areas on dark pigs can be dusted with a white powder to give the animals a nice appearance. Here again, too much powder is not desirable. Prior to entering the show ring, the exhibitor should brush the pig clean of all straw and clean its feet of excess mud or manure. The exhibitor should be ready when the class is called. Promptness in getting the pig to the show ring is the mark of a good exhibitor.

Reference cited: Swine Showmanship Guide-The Judging Connection.com
http://www.thejudgingconnection.com/pdfs/Basic_Swine_Showmanship.pdf

Additional resources related to 4-H Swine Projects:
<https://pubs.wsu.edu/ListItems.aspx?Keyword=Swine>
<http://www.4-hmall.org/Category/swine.aspx>

Next Article: Prior to the Show and Show Day

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