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## Raising Healthy Pigs

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Healthy pigs are key to successful niche pork production. Healthy pigs grow faster and are more efficient in converting feed to gain. Farms with healthy pigs have fewer cull and dead pigs. The veterinarian is an important partner in raising healthy pigs. It also is essential for stockmen to know the visual differences between healthy and sick pigs (Table 1) and to observe pigs regularly.

**Table 1. Visual differences between healthy and sick pigs.**

Healthy Pigs	Sick Pigs
Active	Listless
Curious	Uninterested
Hungry	Off-feed
Clean and dry	Rough hair with dirty rears

### Checklist for Raising Healthy Pigs

#### **Segregate age groups of pigs.**

This keeps age-related diseases from spreading through your herd. Separate pens are the minimal separation and separate buildings or sites are better. Keep sows and boars separate from younger pigs after weaning. Small herds can practice segregation seasonally. For example, a farm may only farrow twice each year or a feeding floor may be empty for a couple months in the summer.

#### **De-worm and de-mange regularly.**

In bedded, solid floor, or pasture systems worms are a continual threat. Consider worming monthly. Several excellent de-worming products are available as feed or water additives or as injectables. Consider rotating products to prevent resistance. Mange eradication is possible using injectable ivermectin, but every pig on the farm must be correctly treated. Consult with your veterinarian or animal health supplier.

#### **Practice cleanliness and sanitation.**

Keep manure spread or stockpiled in a designated area. Clean up spilled feed or grain and junk piles. Most pathogens need

moisture to live. Clean, dry surfaces, exposed to sunlight (if possible) are an effective way to reduce pathogens. Time between groups also can help.

#### **Change clothes and boots when returning to your farm.**

Provide boots to visitors.

#### **Establish regular veterinary visits.**

Use your veterinarian as a consultant not just as a rescue when disease strikes. Work at preventing diseases not just treating them.

#### **Quarantine new pigs to your farm and buy clean, tested stock.**

Most diseases are transmitted pig-to-pig. A 30+ day isolation of new stock allows time for testing and acclimation.

#### **Practice all-in-all-out.**

This will improve herd health, sanitation, and marketing. The worst practice is to keep the small slow-doing pig (potential disease shedder) and put it with younger pigs.

#### **Vaccinate comprehensively.**

Work with your veterinarian to create a

vaccination program for your herd and stick with it. Always record treatments -- date, dose, and pigs treated. Consider leptospirosis and parvo vaccines for the breeding herds. Consider erysipelas and mycoplasma vaccines for all pigs.

**Manage vaccines.**

Keep vaccines cool, not frozen. Modified live vaccines are inactive if frozen. Some older refrigerators may cycle below 32°F in the back. Read label for application method, dosage, and expiration dates.

**Proper injection technique.**

Use shorter smaller needles for smaller pigs and for subcutaneous injections (as opposed to intramuscular). Change needles every 10 injections or by litter. Never reuse a bent needle. Inject in the proper site (flank for subcutaneous and neck for intramuscular). Dispose of sharps properly.

**Make sure every newborn pig nurses.**

A sow's first milk (colostrum) after farrowing contains antibodies which provide protection from disease for the new pigs.

**Keep older sows.**

Older sows produce more antibodies than young sows.

**Provide plenty of clean, fresh water.**

**Use plenty of clean, dry bedding, and minimize environmental stress.**

Do not crowd pigs. Low stress pigs have a better immune status.

**Dispose of all dead pigs promptly.**

Consider composting.

**Isolate sick or injured pigs to allow them to recover.**

**Practice continuous rodent control.**

**Keep cats away from pigs, feed, and bedding.**

**Keep wild animals and birds away from pigs as much as possible.**

**Additional Resources**

Cowart, Ross P. and Stan W. Casteel. 2001. An Outline of Swine Diseases, A Handbook 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Iowa State University Press. Ames.

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Hill, John and David Sainsbury editors. 1995. The Health of Pigs. Longman Scientific and Technical. Essex, UK.

National Pork Board. 2007. Pork Quality Assurance Plus<sup>TM</sup> Producer Certification Manual. Available at <http://www.pork.org/Producers/PQA/PQAPlus.aspx>.