

#22 SAFE CARE AND HANDLING OF SWINE



Photograph Courtesy of Siskiyou County
4-H Program

Evidence for wild swine (or pigs) becoming first domesticated occurs in the Middle East and possibly China at about 9,000 years ago. Swine are not native to the United States and were first brought to Florida by Spanish explorers in 1539.

Female pigs are called sows if they have produced a litter (usually 8-10 baby pigs called piglets) and gilts if they have not. Male pigs are called boars if they can produce offspring (are fertile) and barrows if they are neutered so they can't.

Swine Characteristics

Being knowledgeable about the following behavioral characteristics may be beneficial when working with pigs:

- They are smart, learn rapidly, and will respond to positive reinforcement.
- They tend to investigate their environment using their vision and sense of smell.
- They do not sweat and therefore, are unable to cool themselves like other mammals such as humans. Instead, they wallow in mud to cool themselves.
- When allowed adequate living space, they will defecate and urinate away from their resting or eating areas.
- They are sensitive to hot, cold, and wet weather and white-colored animals are susceptible to sunburn.
- They tend to follow other pigs and move toward open areas.
- When feeling threatened, they begin to make noise (grunt and squeal) and instinctively flee.

Safe Care and Handling of Swine

- Swine should be kept in a reduced stress environment where they are able to freely move between an outside pen and a covered or enclosed shelter.
- Do not overcrowd swine. Provide sufficient space (at least 6 feet by 12 feet) in their pen.
- During cold weather, the swine shelter should have bedding material such as straw or wood shavings to keep animals warm.
- During hot weather, swine should be cooled by providing shade and a mud wallow or by using fans or water misters.
- Be aware that swine pen fencing may have sharp edges and pen doors can act as pinch points.
- Typically, swine are fed corn supplemented with protein and vitamins. Oats, wheat, soybean meal, and barley when supplemented with protein and vitamins also are suitable swine feeds. Change the type of swine feed gradually over several days to prevent swine disease or fatalities.
- Always be sure swine have an adequate supply of feed and fresh, clean water.
- Clean the swine enclosure on a regular basis.
- To avoid slipping or falling, wear boots or shoes with slip resistant soles and step carefully when feeding and watering swine or while cleaning a swine pen and shelter.
- Take care to use your legs when lifting swine. Swine weighing 50 pounds or more should be lifted by more than one person or through the use of a sling or other lifting device.
- Promptly report any injuries to or from swine to your group leader, parent, or guardian.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after touching swine or any other animals.