

Selection of Market Pigs in Today's times

Down here in Florida we are at a disadvantage when it comes to showing pigs. In other parts of the country shows consist of light weight, middle weight, and heavy weight classes of pigs with six to eight week show seasons. If you had a pig that grows too slow you would land in a light weight class, if you had a pig that converted very efficiently you would end up in a heavy weight class. Most if not all swine shows for fairs and exhibition are market shows where you have a weight range to shoot for typically from 230lbs to 300lbs. You also have an ending date where the show date is already listed and set in stone. So, to summarize you have to ensure that you end up with an animal that grows efficiently enough to land in a 70lbs range (230lbs to 300lbs) over a predetermined amount of time (usually 80 to 90 days).

Keep in mind the show pig industry started as a bi-product of the swine production (for consumption) market. Pig farmers had farrowed swine that exhibited show quality traits in a production setting thus creating a market to sell these pigs for more profit than was seen in the market standard. The magic number in swine production is 250, how many days does it take to get to 250lbs. The standard has always been 144 days to 250lbs equals maximum predictable profits due to feed costs and care.

When we started back in 2010, boars were cataloged and shown with the EPD numbers (# of days to 250lbs, and litter sizes). Today very rarely do you see any information to guide you in the direction for breeding purposes. As a breeder they may select a boar that won every show they were exhibited, named Grand Champion several times over however what you don't know was

the boar 6 months old or was the boar 9 months old at show. This could be a huge problem in the market pig setting since the breeder is crossing their herds with boars that might not grow or grow too slowly to hit the target weights needed.

Not many people exhibit pure bred pigs down here in Florida because we are a state that is considered an open class format. This means you can show against cross bred pigs or pure-bred pigs in the same classes. The disadvantage of showing pure bred pigs against cross bred pigs leads us all in the direction that most pigs shown down here consists of crossbreds.

As a lesson in what EPD's do in the cattle industry

Expected progeny differences (EPDs)

Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) allow for the comparison of animals within a breed for their genetic potential as parents for a given trait. EPDs have existed in the beef industry for decades and their use has produced intended genetic change in many traits.

With the swine industry specifically the show pig industry moving away from this standard, buyer beware. Breeders are breeding pigs to exhibit early muscle expression, fast growth rate at an early age, and that "showpig" look at eight weeks old. In our experience the problem with these types of pigs is when they get to 150-180lbs they basically stop growing or change their eating habits and feed intake. There is no quick fix for this problem, all the cake mix, tuna fish, or syrup in the world will not fix this issue because the issue stems back to genetics. You ask yourself why, I say because

the true breeder that pays their bills off selling pigs equals more profit. The game changes when a person has to pay their bills off selling pigs, if you had to pay your light bill off selling show pigs what would you do?

As a buyer what can you do.

1. Find out what the Sow (momma) did as a show pig, was she a fast grower and did she compete?
2. Find out how much the Sow has been crossed up her breedings? The further one gets away from their genetic base the less repeatable the genetics will be. For example, if you are buying a sow that is a 4th cross that was bred to a 7th cross watch out.

What is a F1 pig?

In this system, **F1** females from two maternal breeds are mated to purebred or **F1**boars from breeds strong in terminal traits (such as leanness, growth rate and muscling). All **pigs** from this cross are sold as market **hogs**. No gilts are retained for breeding purposes, thus making this a terminal crossbreeding system.

3. Was the Sow/Gilt a prospect show pig? I don't care how much the sow/gilt won if she was 9 months old when she was being shown at 250lbs buyer beware because the genetic potential for the offspring to follow suit are high.
4. Find out what boar the sow/gilt was bred to, if the sow/gilt was a crossbred did the breeder use a pure bred boar in an attempt to breed some feed efficiency back in the litters.

The reason I decided to take time to write this article is because we are not only dealing with show pigs we are also dealing with kids. Kids that could come in their first year, have a pig that doesn't grow, misses the fair, then grows disinterested with the whole process.

We are not only raising pigs we are also raising kids using livestock as a tool.