

Selecting Breeding Pigs From a Litter: Hints for Beginners

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Selection is best done early or left as long as possible. If fattening the whole litter for pork or bacon choose when they have reached the desired killing weight. If this is not possible it will have to be done at weaning, although three weeks of age is a good time if the little pigs can be inspected without upsetting them or their mother.

A large well lit loosebox or yard is the best place for "sorting them out". Also have a pen for rejects, and put them in there as soon as faults are spotted. You must be able to see them walk from a distance of at least 15-20 feet away to see any bad movements.

Start by process of elimination — chuck out any with bad underlines (superficial teats or very unevenly placed teats). There should be ideally, 14 evenly spaced, well-developed teats. Crooked legs, uneven feet, crooked jaws, mismarked pigs, runty slow growing pigs and those which show genetic defects (extra toes etc) must all go into the reject pen.

Of the pigs left single out those most evenly fleshed (no hollow backs or dips behind the shoulders) with well filled hams and conforming to breed type.

Gilt being kept for breeding must be able to stand up to having many litters. She needs a strong level back, depth and a good spring of rib to provide heart and lung room, well-developed bone and neat feet. The underline is most important; the best milking sows are those with well-developed teats starting well forward. A small teated sow will probably lose teats with each litter. She must also be of a calm bold disposition and not snappy or nervy.

A boar should be masculine but again not snappy and bad tempered. He too must have a good underline, as this is hereditary and will come through in the litters. A badly teated boar can leave bad underlines, which can take years to breed out. Legs are important, especially the hind ones, a little spring on the pasterns is desirable but too much may mean weakness later on. Again a good depth of heart and lungs, good fleshing and lastly but by no means least, his testicles must be firm and of roughly even size, pulpy soft ones often mean infertility.

The final point we are looking for is 'ingredient x', an extra quality or presence' which the best animals have. A mixture of character and conformation, the look of having been neatly put together with perfectly matching parts to make a 'tidy' whole.

If you have any left after all this ruthless selection and are having difficulty deciding between them, go for the one that 'fills your eye' - the one that always seems to draw your eye back to it.

Do not, however be tempted to forgive bad faults, as the animal may be around for some time and it may stop you from showing it or selling it to another breeder.

Feeding and rearing from now on are important. It is as easy to spoil good young stock by overfeeding and putting too much weight on young joints and bones as it is to impoverish them with under feeding. At 18 weeks, both sexes should be receiving 4-5 lbs of good quality sow feed per day, increasing by 1 or 2 lbs before service or starting work. No pig is totally perfect, if you do find one then shoot it and stuff it as you may never find another!



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