

Suggestions For Raising Growing-Finishing Swine in Dirt Lots¹

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Introduction

The favorable climate and low initial investment account for the popularity of raising pigs in dirt lots. With proper care, pigs raised in dirt lots can usually gain weight just as rapidly as pigs raised in more expensive, confinement facilities. However, pigs raised in dirt lots will usually require more feed per pound of gain than pigs raised in confinement facilities.

The following are some guidelines for rearing swine from feeder pig size (about 50 lb) to market size of 240 lb in dirt lots.

Site Selection

Areas with well drained sandy soils where shade is present are the best sites (for example, a wooded area). Avoid poorly drained areas. Keep in mind that pigs will kill trees. The greater the density of pigs, the faster the trees will be killed. Avoid putting lots on land with a steep slope unless the pigs will have a lot of room. The pigs will clear vegetation and the lots can become eroded. The site should also allow for ease of maintenance (for example to periodically disk

the lots). To reduce potential pollution problems, lots should not be located next to streams or lakes or have streams flowing through them.

Space Requirements and Number of Head Per Lot

The space allotted per pig in a dirt lot system varies depending on soil type, drainage, amount of rainfall, etc. With well drained sandy soils, about 100 sq ft per pig is usually sufficient (an area 10 ft x 10 ft). On heavier clay-based soils allow at least 200 to 250 sq ft per pig (an area 15 ft x 15 ft).

A lot capacity of 50 head or less is desirable; however, as many as 100 head may be raised in one lot as long as the pigs are uniform in size.

Shelter Requirements

About 5 to 6 sq ft of roof area per pig is recommended with either permanent or portable sheltering (an area of 2 ft x 3 ft). The sides of these shelters should be able to be opened during the summer. During the winter the shelters should be closed on three sides with the south side open. During

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the summer it is possible to raise swine without shelter as long as there is natural shade and cover available (i.e., a wooded area).

It is important that the shelter area stay dry, in particular during the winter. Floors in the shelters are desirable, especially with small shelters.

Feeder and Watering Space Requirements

Provide one feeder space (hole) for each four to five pigs. Provide one waterer per 15 pigs. It is best to have at least two waterers per pen. Nipple type waterers designed for pigs work best.

Other Recommendations

The lots should be periodically moved, if possible, to a new location. If lots cannot be moved, they periodically should be disked and left idle for about six months. This will decrease the problem with internal parasites (worms) and other diseases. This will also help keep "mud holes" from getting excessively large.

The feeders should be placed on a concrete or wooden platform such that the pigs will stand on the platform while eating. A concrete or some other solid platform should also be located under the waterer. This will help to keep pigs from forming "mud holes" under the waterers and allows the pigs to get out of the mud to drink.

Related Information

Controlling Internal Parasites in Swine. Animal Science Fact Sheet AS 50.

Deworming Suggestions for Pigs Raised in Dirt Lot Facilities. Animal Science Fact Sheet - AS/NF-1.

Swine Production on a Small Scale. Circular 470. Florida Cooperative Extension Service.

Please note that many swine production units, in particular units that raise more than 400 pigs at any one time, have to follow state and (or) local waste management regulations and may have to be permitted. Contact your local County Extension Service for more information.