

BASIC SHOWPIG NUTRITION  
Dr. Kevin Burgoon  
Nutritionist, HONOR Show Chow

Nutrition for show pigs can be as simple or as complex as the pig dictates. Unfortunately, there is no one method to feed pigs headed for the show ring, and consistently compete at a high level.

There are many factors that influence how a pig is fitted for show.

Some of these are:

Genetic road map

Environment

Management level

Health status

Gender (barrow or gilt)

Age

So, this article will deal with the basics. This may shock some of you, but it takes way more than nutrition for the pig to find it's way to Grand Champion. It takes a combination of nutrition, genetics, management, and health to get the most out of your showpig project, each playing a vital, equal role. The following will look at a few of the things that will play a huge role in how your show pig responds to nutrition.

Water is extremely important to how the pig expresses it's genetic potential, and how feed is utilized. Water is directly related to feed intake. If you find that your pig is not eating or growing well, look at the water source first. Water should be clean, fresh and abundant at all times. If the water is too cold during cool months, or too warm during warm months your pig will not eat correctly, and will not fully express it's genetic road map.

Make sure your pig has a comfortable home. Your barn or pig house, should be draft free and dust free. A coughing pig will have a less than desirable outcome. The pen should be free of items that might cause injury and subsequently impact the movement and soundness of your pig.

All of these things impact how the pig utilizes the feed that is offered, and ultimately how the pig expresses the genetic – nutrition interaction.

There are also things that even the greatest of all feeds cannot accomplish. Even the best feeds will not increase body length, base width, or bone. Feed will not make the pig tall at the point of the shoulder. Nor will the best feed turn an unsound pig into a sound one. You will need to select animals that already express these features.

Nutrition unlocks the genetic potential of your showpig project. A great feed will do only so much for poor genetic potential. However, a poor quality feed can ruin great genetics.

If you purchase a pig(s) from a pig sale consider medicating the pig for at least 14 days after purchase. When pigs are placed in the same air space as other pigs with a differing immune status the result can have serious consequences, if not properly addressed.

Feeds medicated with Lincomycin®, CTC & Denagard®, or ASP or CSP are appropriate for receiving young newly purchased pigs. Injectable antibiotics are appropriate (consult your local veterinarian). Water soluble medication is also applicable.

The HONOR Show Chow Showpig Grower L200, medicated with 200 grams/ton Lincomycin is a very good choice for receiving pigs. This medication offers protection against respiratory and gut immune challenges. Another good choice is HONOR Show Chow Showpig Prep that is medicated with CTC and Denagard. Feed either of these feeds for at least 14 days to newly purchased pigs.

Remember that muscle is protein, and protein is comprised of amino acids. So, one strategy would be if you purchase a pig that is moderate to light muscled, you probably should look at feeding a 20% crude protein such as HONOR Show Chow Showpig Grower (either T100 or L200) feed until the pig weighs at least 80 to 100 lbs.

If the pig you have purchased is heavily muscled, you may want to feed an 18% crude protein feed, such HONOR Show Chow Showpig

Finisher T100 early on to prevent the pig from developing “too much” muscle, and therefore becoming tight moving.

For very heavily muscled showpigs, the HONOR Show Chow Showpig 16 is a great option, once the pig reaches about 125 lbs in bodyweight.

Also remember that every metabolic process has a caloric cost. Lean tissue synthesis, bone growth, skin and hair development all have an energetic cost. Energy fuels everything. To achieve maximum genetic expression, an appropriate level of energy must be fed, either in the complete feed, or with an energy supplement such as High Octane Power Fuel.

As the pig grows and develops it may become tight moving or become somewhat “hard” muscled. When, or if you notice these signs, it is a good idea to decrease crude protein, increase dietary energy, or both.

You might have noticed some folks feeding rolled oats (oat groats) along with their regular showpig feed. It might be a good idea to offer a small amount of oat groats (1/2 lbs) each day with the pig’s feed to increase the particle size of the total diet. This is a good idea as the pig is less likely to suffer from ulcers, although many pigs perform very well and are never fed oat groats. It is a personal decision.

Actually, almost all pigs have an ulcer of some kind. Whether they become bleeding ulcers and a real problem to the pig’s health and a threat to life is a matter of the total stress imposed on the pig. So again environment and management play a huge role in the pig’s health status and response to feed.

Whether you hand feed or self feed at the beginning of the feeding period it is merely a feed delivery process. However, hand feeding usually results in the pig becoming gentle more quickly. When the pig associates you with feed, it begins to trust you. Pigs are like most creatures, they need to learn that you are not going to do them harm.

Self feeding can also be effective. The important thing is to spend time with your pig regardless of how you plan to deliver the feed.

There is no substitute for time spent building a bond and trust between pig and exhibitor. Regardless of how you deliver the feed at the onset of your project, you will need to begin hand feeding at some point in the feeding period to allow your pig to look it's best on show day.

Lastly, have a plan. Modern showpigs usually look their best at about 6 to 6 ½ months of age. So, when purchasing your pigs select appropriate aged pigs.

Feed with the show ring in mind. From the start, try to picture what you desire your pig to look like on show day. And, feed to that end. There are many supplements, topdresses and nutritional products that allow you to change the outcome of your pig. Again, muscle is protein, and body condition or cover is a fat layer. To improve muscling feed a high protein feed or topdress, such as High Octane Champion Drive. To improve cover or body condition, use a high energy feed or supplement (High Octane Power Fuel).

Paylean is really not a basic issue so it will not be covered in this article, except to say it is a tool and not a magic potion. Unsound, heavily muscled, or stress positive pigs need not be fed Paylean.

If you do choose to feed Paylean, High Octane Showpig Paylean Premix is an excellent low inclusion, well fortified product.

Good luck with your showpig project. Enjoy the learning process along the way. And, if you need help....ask. There is usually someone willing to help.