Feeding show pigs for local, county, state, and national shows is a project that is undertaken by many committed and dedicated young people throughout the United States. Anyone of us who has taken on this responsibility can tell stories of feeding, washing, exercising, hauling, and showing those crazy hogs!

Searching for the right pig, picking your pig, getting your pig home and comfortable, and getting your pig on feed are extremely important steps in getting prepared for showing your pig. Picking your pig should be based on experience. If possible, get some expert advice on picking your pig from your adult leader, ag teacher, county agent and breeders. You should be looking for large framed, sound moving, expressively muscled pigs that, most importantly, will be lean. You must be looking for these attributes in a 50-75 pound pig. But never forget, you will be showing a 220-270 pound pig. Your pig must grow up to be good, not just be good at 50 pounds!

It has been said that the feeding and management program accounts for 75% of what your pig will look like at his show weight. I agree, but can make the case that if you start with a lemon, feeding and management will not help make a winner in the show ring. In addition, if you start with a good hog and your feeding and management program stinks, feeding and management account for 100% of the reason you and your pig don't receive a ribbon!

Your management must include a comfortable, dust free area for your pig. Bedding is desirable, anything from shavings to rice hulls to straw. Avoid hay, if possible, as some pigs may have allergic reactions to certain types of hay. Your pig should have extremely clean, cool water access at all times. Your pig should consume 1.5 to 2 times the amount of water in comparison to feed consumed. If you use a nipple waterer and you are in a hot climate, the nipple may become too hot for the pig to drink from. Place the nipple in a shaded area if possible. The height of the nipple should be at the base of his chest for the most comfortable drinking.

Feeders and pans are an extremely important part of your pigs feeding program. Your pigs should be able to eat from a pan or feeder you would be willing to eat from. All feeders and pans should be cleaned at least once per week. As your pig eats, he will deposit saliva, dirt, dust, and germs of all types in the feeder or pan. This mess must be cleaned up to prevent mold and bacteria build up and the possibility of you pig getting sick from any of these germs. In addition, your feeder should also be raised off the ground to prevent added stress to your pigs front legs. Your pig does not need the added stress to his front knees which could cause him to become "knock kneed" and shorten the point of his shoulder and decrease the appearance of the width of the floor of his chest.

Always keep track of how much your pig is eating and try to watch and make sure he is consuming plenty of water. If you notice that your pig loses his appetite, shows signs of sickness, or begins limping on any leg, get medical attention for your pig immediately. Your pig can have many problems that may be cured should you catch and treat the problem fast enough. However, if you wait too long, your pig may not be able to get over any problem that he may have.

Feeding your show pig is the primary input you have into turning that good pig into a champion. You must feed your pig what his body requires to enable him to reach his genetic potential for muscle development and leanness. Feeds are formulated and manufactured at every aspect, from a national to a local level, and from the cheapest possible to the best that can be produced.
You should take into account a number of factors when deciding what brand of feed, including: feed quality, nutrient quality, availability, feed freshness, and price. Another important factor when deciding on a brand of feed is the ability to receive knowledgeable information from your feed dealer, as well as, the feed representative.

You should decide on one brand of feed and stay with that brand throughout the feeding period unless you experience extreme circumstances. Reputable feed companies generally spend a tremendous amount of money and time developing the feeding program and use pig weight and show schedules to formulate different rations that will work best for your pig. In addition, adding grain products or protein products to the ration will generally destroy the amino acid profile and energy in the feed. You should decide on one brand of feed and stay with that brand throughout the feeding period unless you experience extreme circumstances. Reputable feed companies generally spend a tremendous amount of money and time developing the feeding program and use pig weight and show schedules to formulate different rations that will work best for your pig. In addition, adding grain products or protein products to the ration will generally destroy the amino acid profile and energy in the feed.

The most important aspect of what is in any feed bag is not printed on the tag. The energy level of the feed is not anywhere to be found on the feed tag. In order to find out the energy level of a feed you are considering, ask your feed dealer and he should be able to get the energy level for you. Protein, lysine, fat, fiber, calcium, phosphorus, salt, selenium, and zinc are mandatory listed on the feed tag and you should ensure your feed has the correct amounts for the size, age, and weight of your show pig.

You should also follow all directions and precautions printed on the tag. These precautions are taken straight from the Office of the State Chemist and ignoring these precautions may endanger your pig or more importantly anyone who may consume pork from your pig after the show. You must also follow all withdrawal information printed on the tag. Withdrawal time periods are the amount of time you must take your pig off of a feed that contains medication that requires a withdrawal period before it can be slaughtered. This withdrawal period is also crucial to follow for drug test at shows. If you are to follow a withdrawal period, you must withdraw that feed from your pig before he can be shown. Therefore, take precautions to ensure that your pig is not going to be without a top quality feed only days before show day. If your pig falls apart the last 3-5 days before show, all your preparation has been for nothing!

Your goal in feeding your show pig should be to help your pig develop the most amount of superior muscling with a minimum of excess fat deposits. To accomplish this, you must provide your pig with an adequate amount of nutrients, including amino acids, vitamins, macrominerals, microminerals, vitamins, energy, and the most important nutrient, water. Your pig, up to 125-150 pounds, cannot consume more energy than is required for maintenance and lean tissue gain. Therefore, feeding your pig all he can consume by hand feeding or self-feeding is recommended. Once your pig has reached the point that he begins developing excess fat deposition, the amount of nutrients your pig requires may not decrease, but the amount of energy he requires has decreased. You can accomplish this by restricting the amount of feed your pig is consuming or changing to a finishing ration formulated for show pigs.

Concerning protein, or amino acids, insufficient protein will reduce daily gain and result in less muscle and more fat in your show pig. An oversupply of protein may improve the amount of lean muscle mass but will generally decrease your pigs gain per day as well as his feed conversion efficiency.

Anytime your pig is stressed or sick, his immune system will be called on to fight antigens. This will decrease his appetite and cause fever. Research has shown that healthy pigs whose immune system is basically unchallenged, grow faster and produce more muscle and less fat.
Therefore, the more comfortable you keep your pig and the more effective the feed ration and medication in the feed, the less stress your pig will encounter and the more muscle and less fat he will represent in the show ring.

You should consult with your feed supplier to determine that the amino acid profile, and the vitamin and mineral rates are sufficient and in the correct ratio, and that the lysine levels of your pig will be met. Your feed supplier should be able to get all this information. If you have concerns, please contact your adult leader, ag teacher or county agent to confirm that your feed will provide the best opportunity for your pig to reach his genetic potential.

Remember the old computer adage: GIGO - garbage in garbage out. What you feed and your overall management program will determine if your pig can reach his genetic potential and most importantly, if you and your pig come out of the show ring as WINNERS!!