

Swine Showmanship



Showmanship is one of the most important parts of a 4-H swine project. Showmanship is judged on your ability to effectively exhibit an animal to its best advantage in a competitive show ring environment. Advanced planning and practice at home are keys to becoming a good showman and gaining your hog's trust. Continued planning, practice, and neat appearance at the show will help you succeed at showing swine.

Your personal appearance is important when showing your hog. Dress neatly, and look like a livestock person. Wear leather shoes or boots for safety and appearance. If the animal steps on your foot, it is much easier for the hog's foot to slip off a leather boot than an athletic shoe, and leather shoes are thicker than canvas shoes.

Wear clean, pressed jeans or slacks and a neat button-down or collared sport shirt, not a T-shirt. Tuck in your shirt, and wear a belt for added neatness. It is best not to wear a cap, since it may take the judge's concentration away from the animal.

Equipment Needed

A driving tool is required to guide or drive your hog. You can use a livestock cane, hog whip, riding crop, hog-driving stick, or plastic piping. Livestock canes or fiberglass driving sticks are the preferred tools.

Use a small hand brush and rag to brush the hog and as an additional driving tool. The brush needs to be small enough to fit in your back pocket or the palm of your hand.

Use a spray bottle of water to groom and cool the hog, but don't take the bottle into the show ring.

Before the Show

Thoroughly wash your hog and be sure it is clean. Pay particular attention to the ears; scrubbing with your brush cleans them well enough. Take special care not to get water in the hog's ears because this affects its balance. Before returning a clean hog to the pen, check for, remove, and replace any soiled bedding.

Just before entering the ring, mist the hog with water from your spray bottle. Brush the hog's hair the way it naturally lies—do not pull the hog's top straight back. This makes the top appear flat, and a flat top appears fat. Brush the hair with a natural part down the spine to give the hog the appearance of a meatier top.

Do not use oils or powders on a hog because these items make the animal hot. Packers are less likely to accept hogs that have oils or powders on them or hogs that have been clipped. Daily brushing and proper hair care can eliminate the need for clipping.

Practice Showing

A superior job in showing a hog starts long before the day of the show. Practice driving your hog at home to help control the hog and to polish your showing skills. This time working at home is crucial to build trust with your hog and to learn about one another so your hog will drive and act appropriately in competition.

Pretend a tree or other object is the judge. Work on moving around the object as you would around a judge in the show ring. Once you gain control of the hog, driving in a figure eight pattern provides practice for any show ring situation you might encounter.

In the Show Ring

Be on time for your class. Being prompt shows you are organized and ready to work, and it is a courtesy to the other exhibitors.

Upon entering the ring, the hog may be excited and take off running. Calmly walk to your hog and take control by driving it 10–15 feet in front of the judge. Do not drive the hog any closer to the judge unless requested.

Use your cane or driving stick to move the animal. Touch the animal from the forerib forward (shoulder and jowl area) to turn. If you want the hog to move to the right, touch its left jowl. If the hog needs to move to the left, touch its right side. Always drive forward by tapping below the rear hocks. Never beat or hit the hog. Keep the driving tool off the top, loin, and ham areas. Likewise, never place your hand on the hog's ham or loin.

Just because you have a cane or whip does not mean you have to tap your hog constantly. When the hog is moving, let it walk. Do not rush the hog. Use the driving tool only when you need to keep the hog moving from one point to another in front of the judge.

Always keep the hog between you and the judge; this provides the judge with a full view of your hog. When you move or change directions, switch the driving tool to the other hand. Try not to use your hands or knees to drive the animal. Younger exhibitors may have to use their hands or knees at times, but the only acceptable time to do this is during penning.

When walking your hog, calmly move with the hog, staying on the side opposite the judge. A slight bend at the waist may give you better control of the hog. Be relaxed. If you are calm, your hog will be calm and respond to your commands.

Be courteous at all times and aware of danger zones to avoid. One danger zone is groups of other hogs. If your hog gets in a group, let it work its way out. Do not block the view of another hog or exhibitor.

In a group of hogs, your hog may engage in a fight. Do not jump between the fighting hogs. You may use the cane to assist in controlling the situation. Simply snare or hook your hog's nose and pull it away from the other hog. This will help separate the hogs so a ring man can get a board between the fighting animals.

Another danger zone is a corner of the show ring. If your hog gets into a corner, place your brush on its snout. The hog will not like the bristles and should move from the corner.

If you are selected to be penned, do not stop showing your hog. Raise your hand, work your hog toward the pen area, and drive it into the designated pen, closing and latching the gate upon entering it. Do not wait for a ring man, but continue to move the hog to a pen as mentioned so the show can continue to move smoothly.

While in the pen, position your hog with its ham toward the show ring. This provides the judge with a view to easily evaluate the muscle and leanness of your hog. Have someone bring your spray bottle to the pen area. Spray and brush your hog, allow it to relax, but do not let it lie down.

If the judge sprinkles shavings or other materials on your hog, brush the substance off as inconspicuously as possible. This shows an awareness of what is going on, and it shows that you have pride in exhibiting your hog.

When you leave the pen to reenter the show ring, close and latch the gate behind you. This show ring courtesy prevents other hogs from entering the pen and taking time away from the judge's view.

Make eye contact with the judge. This is important because good eye contact ensures you will not miss a cue to be penned or to follow some other request. Also, the judge is more likely to look at your hog.

Be ready to answer questions about your project. The judge may ask any number of questions about your animal and the swine industry to find out what you have learned from your 4-H swine project.

Questions may be easy and include such items as the weight, gender, breed, age, or parts of the animal. They may also include carcass composition, swine management practices, feeding and nutrition, or marketing systems. Learn all you can, and be prepared for any type of question.

When the class is over or you are dismissed, continue to show the hog as you leave the ring. Listen to the judge's comments, and learn from the experience of showing your animal.

Return your hog to its pen. Be sure the gate is locked, and provide fresh water. Go back to the show, and try to learn more by watching other exhibitors.

Have Fun and Try Your Best

Always be courteous and respectful to show officials, the judge, and your fellow exhibitors. Be a gracious participant or winner. Be a good sport at all times, and accept setbacks with dignity. Be sure to congratulate exhibitors who had a good day in the show ring. Learn from your show experience, and strive to do better at the next show. Take time to write sponsors' thank-you notes for assisting with awards from the show. All of these items will make you a good representative of your club, school, county, and family.

Remember: Just by participating, working hard, and doing your best, you are a winner! And above all, have fun showing your hog!

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