

Just the Facts!

Q&A Regarding Body Clipping and Shaving Pigs

Dr. Steve Moeller, The Ohio State University

Industry Questions and Responses

In response to packer directives and loss of market access for body clipped or shaved hogs, local, county, and state swine exhibitions throughout the United States have attempted to establish rules and criteria to reduce the problem. "No Clipping" rules have been met with some resistance. Below is a list of common questions and responses to these questions based on the science and knowledge that is available to the industry.

What is the desired or minimum hair length for the de-hairing process to be effective?

Some states have implemented minimum hair lengths to exhibit pigs. However, there have been no scientific studies conducted to determine an exact or minimum hair length necessary for the de-hairing process to work effectively. What is known is that the shorter the hair length, the more difficult it is to remove. Conversely, the longer the hair length, the more successful the de-hairing process will be. Thus, the best recommendation is to not body clip the pig. If a pig is never clipped, then no value loss due to clipping can occur. Natural hair length in commercially raised swine presents no problems in the de-hairing process.

Is the length of hair only a problem in the colored breeds (Berkshire, Duroc, Hampshire, Hereford, Pietrain, Poland, Spot)?

No. The ability to de-hair carcasses is evident regardless of hair color when the length of hair is short. However, the ability for plant personnel and inspectors to identify de-hairing problems is more obvious in colored pigs as the remaining hair stands out more clearly against the white skin. Colored pigs, in particular Durocs, do tend to have coarser hair and in the fall months (late September through December) packers report that Duroc pigs have what is termed 'hard hair' that is difficult to remove even in commercial settings. It appears the Duroc breed, in particular, creates problems for the packer in the fall months as a result of changes in hair characteristics in response to colder outdoor temperatures. Even in the colored breeds, if you do not clip, there is no value loss.

My pig has no hair or the hair is very fine, sparse or patchy on the body, does this affect the de-hairing process?

In certain instances, pigs will have very fine, sparse, and patchy hair growth. Pigs raised on concrete and those raised in enclosed, environmentally controlled facilities tend to have finer hair when compared to those raised on dirt or those that are provided access to the outdoors because the characteris-

tics of concrete are conducive to rubbing and hair removal. This does not cause problems in the de-hairing process as absence of hair and even fine hair, so long as it is long enough, will not create problems.

I purchased a body clipped pig at a sale. Will the pig's hair grow enough prior to my fair date?

The purchaser of any pig becomes responsible for meeting any show requirements and regulations. The hair on the pig will continue to grow after being clipped, but the rate of growth will depend on the facilities the pig is reared in and the time between purchase and show dates. The best advice is to plan ahead and know your show's requirements regarding hair length and clipping. Because hair growth occurs at the base or follicle, hair that has been trimmed will have a blunt end, whereas natural hair growth will have a rounded end. Your decision to purchase a clipped or shaved pig depends on the risk you are willing to take on the rate of hair growth and time between purchase and exhibition.

Show pig producers are now promoting the use of pumice stone to reduce hair length and (or) remove hair from the pig. Does this influence the ability to remove the hair from the carcass?

The primary issue remains the length of the hair. If the hair length is too short, the de-hairing machines will not work effectively and the packing industry loses money. Eventually, these losses will be passed back to the show pig industry through decreased purchase prices or refusal to purchase show pigs. The pig is also subject to unnecessary stress in the process of rubbing the pig with a pumice stone.

What are my best opportunities to improve the appearance of my pig for the show?

A practice that has long worked well in the show arena is daily brushing of the hair on the pig. A pig that has been brushed daily and washed on occasion will have hair that shines in the show ring. This requires hard work and dedication on behalf of the youth and it will instill a sense of responsibility, pride, and accomplishment, as well as a better understanding of the pig compared with a "quick fix" body clip or shave. In cases where pigs are purchased for exhibition, define your criteria for purchase and follow through, knowing the potential consequences if your pig does not meet hair requirements. In addition, when showing the pig, the exhibitor should use only water, never oils, show supplies, and other aids to make the hair shine for the judge. Following these practices will provide ample opportunity to succeed in the show ring and learn in the process.