

How to pick a pig

by Marjorie Bender

The following article by Marjorie Bender was originally printed in The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy News July-August 2009. It appears there with permission of the author and the ALBC. The article is the result of an interview with then RWHA President: Josh Wendland on his farm in Kansas. Josh Wendland is designated a Master Breeder thru The Livestock Conservancy.

The following are criteria that Josh uses when evaluating which of his hogs should become breeding stock.

Head: Wide forehead. Animals with wide foreheads will usually have wide backs and chests.
Ears: Ears set on top corners of the head. Avoid ears set on the side of the head. Tips of the ears tipped over. Avoid ears that rollup along the side. **Eyes:** should be bright and intelligent. Avoid overly short and upturned **snouts**. The **head** should be of medium length-neither too long or too short. The head should have good depth. A longer shallower head correlates with a more wild-type body conformation that generally carries less meat. **Temperament:** Well-tempered. Cull mean and aggressive animals. **Boars:** Masculine in appearance, an active breeder without being temperamentally aggressive. **Scrotum** should be large and well set back, indicating large testicles. **Gait:** Fluid and functional. These pigs used to walk miles to market. Select for this ability. **Wattles:** Well-attached, substantial. Avoid stringy, poorly attached wattles. **Feet:** Feet and toes must be sound, allowing the pig to move easily and comfortably. **Toes** should not twist, grow overly long or in any other way impair the animal's ability to carry its weight, breed or move. Sound feet are important for the animal's ability to have a long productive life and provide the producer with an economic return. **Legs:** The legs should be well set on the four corners of the pig's body. Avoid 'post-legged' front legs. Avoid stiff hips and stifles. **Back:** medium to long in length. The back must not be so long that the sow/gilt cannot support the weight of the boar when breeding. Excessively long backs are weak and will shorten the productive life of the hog by one to two litters. **Tail:** A tightly curled tail is an indicator of good health. Limp tails suggest that something is amiss. The tail should be attached as the hip falls off from the back. Avoid attachment that is too high (short backed) or too low. **Flank:** the lower edge of the flank should be shaped like an inverted V. Experienced breeders say this is an indicator of good milking ability. A boar with this flank conformation will produce female offspring with good milking ability. **Hams:** Should be large and solid, not flabby. Avoid exaggerated hams which can result in birthing problems. **Body:** The body should be shaped like a block or brick. The body should have good depth from back to belly, indicating good capacity for organs. Long-backed, deep bodied animals carry larger quantities of high quality loin cuts. Balance length with functionality. Seek good balance front to back, well-developed shoulders and well-developed hams. The animals should be symmetrical from front to back. **Color:** Red Wattle hogs can range in color from light red that is nearly golden to a deep mahogany that is nearly black. Different strains have different characteristics. **Hair coat:** Straight and course or soft and curly. Different strains have different characteristics. **Nipples:** there should be at least 6 pairs. It's not uncommon for Red Wattles to have litters of 10, and each piglet has its own nipple, so sows need to have a nipple for each piglet. Cull all pigs with an odd number of nipples. **Growth-rate:** Pigs should grow to 250-350 pounds in 6-8 months when they should be marketed if not being kept as breeders. Select pigs that mature earlier.