

Central Washington Animal Agriculture Team



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4-H/FFA Project Pig Pricing—2005

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What is a feeder pig worth? For commercial purposes? For show?

Let's look at the facts. According to the USDA-Iowa Department of Agriculture Market News, the average cash price paid for 40-50 pounds commercial feeder pigs in the U.S. during the week ending January 28, 2005, was \$77.98 per head. This was for pigs expected to yield 50-54% lean value at base slaughter weights, usually 250-260 pounds. In other words, \$78 for just an average pig. With prices for slaughter pigs at nearly all-time highs, demand for feeder pigs that are expected to go to market this summer is very good. In addition, market prices for slaughter hogs are usually even higher in June and July than in February or March.

So, what are project pigs of show quality worth? Significantly more than \$78 each! First, "average" pigs that yield 50-54% lean value might earn blue ribbons but would not be very competitive in very many shows. Most youth want a better quality pig than that and should be willing to pay more for it. Second, the cost of producing project pigs is at least 20-25% higher than for commercial feeder pigs and the breeder/producer deserves to be paid for that added cost.

Show pig producers are usually small and do not benefit from economies of size like commercial feeder pig producers do. They also spend more money on breeding stock and/or boar semen and also on feed. They give considerably more care and attention to each individual animal they raise. They also usually work directly and personally with each young person who buys one or more of their pigs. Last, the price of a high quality project pig from outside of the Pacific Northwest would likely be even higher to cover transportation costs.

Now for the bottom line for the spring of 2005. No one should expect to purchase a good quality 40-50 lb show pig for less than \$100 per head. To do so would fail to adequately compensate the breeder for his/her costs of production. A price of \$100 to \$125 would be fair to both buyer and seller under current market conditions. Animals of excellent quality from a well-respected breeder could certainly be worth \$150 each.

Are most youth likely to earn a profit if they pay \$125 for their project animal? Maybe not! But, is that the primary purpose of a 4-H or FFA swine project? For me, it certainly isn't, nor should be.