

# SWINE

## DOCKING A PIG'S TAIL

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### IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC

Many swine producers today raise their pigs in total confinement. When pigs are raised under these conditions, there is often a high incidence of tail biting which leads to cannibalism and extreme economic loss to the producer. The major management technique used to prevent this tail biting and eventual cannibalism is the removal of the pig's tail at a very young age.

### WHAT YOUR 4-H'ERS WILL ACCOMPLISH

As a result of this activity your 4-H'ers will be able to:

1. Demonstrate to the group why, when, and how to dock a baby pig's tail.
2. Develop the life skills of relating to others, expressing themselves, and feeling worthwhile about themselves.



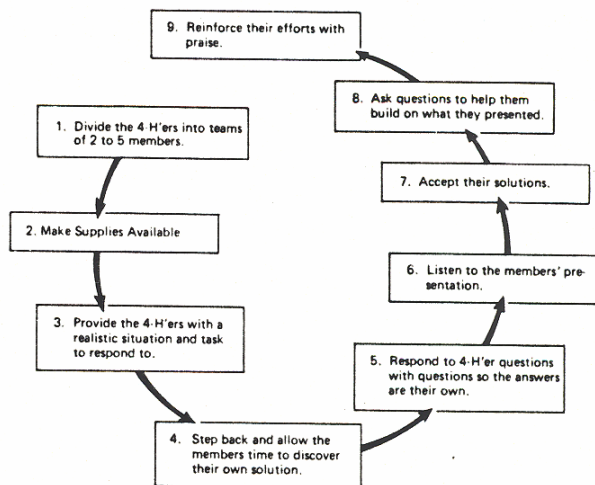
### PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

A little time spent planning the meeting, reviewing the resource materials, collecting the supplies required, and involving others in each of these steps will often make the difference between a very hectic meeting and a very exciting one for both you and your members.

**Supplies:** side cutter or cauterizer, disinfectant and live pig or model pig made from University of Minnesota 4-H Pig Pattern.

### FACILITATE THE MEETING

You'll want to fully involve your members in a learn-by-doing activity so they can develop both project and life skills during the project meeting. One way to do this is to put yourself in the role of a helper instead of an "up front" teacher. The nine steps below indicate an experiential method leaders have found useful. The situation statement and questions included in this guide are designed to help you also be successful in your challenging and important position of project leader.



**SITUATION:** Your parents have gone to town for the day. You find a note asking you to dock the tails of the new litter.

**TASK:** Demonstrate how you would dock the tails.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

Strive to sequence your questions so the teams can continue to build on their previous answers as they prepare their short demonstrations.

Q. Why is it important to remove the tails on baby pigs?

A. To prevent tail biting when pigs are raised under confined conditions.

Q. Why do pigs want to bite tails under confined conditions?

A. When pigs are crowded and stressed, they become anxious, nervous, and irritable, consequently taking out their aggression on their fellow pigs' tails.

Q. When is the best time to remove the tails of baby pigs?

A. Between the first and third day, or as soon as possible after the pig's birth. There is less shock and stress on the baby pig when the tail is removed early.

Q. What equipment is used to dock baby pigs' tails?

A. Generally a side cutter is used. This is the same equipment one would use to clip the needle teeth of baby pigs. The instrument has relatively sharp blades but not as sharp as a razor blade. Thus when pinched together, the tail is removed. During that process, the vessels are also pinched which results in little bleeding.

Q. How do you hold a baby pig to cut off the tail?

A. The pig is held feet down in the left hand, with the thumb and fingers holding the rear legs while the

pig's head is held between your left elbow and body with the tail setting upward. The tail can then easily be clipped and the pig gently set down.

Q. How would you dock a baby pig's tail?

A. Use the side cutter and cut the tail off  $\frac{3}{8}$ " -  $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the body.

Q. Is disinfectant necessary after the tails are removed?

A. Yes, for two reasons. 1) Disinfectant will help dry up the cut and 2) it will disinfect the area. Keep in mind that once you have made a cut in the tail, you have left an opening for infection to enter.

Q. What type of disinfectant is recommended?

A. Generally a tincture of iodine will work best. Alcohol solutions could be used. Iodine is considered the better product because it does not evaporate as fast and it sticks to the wound.

Q. Is there ever a time when docking of baby pig's tail is not necessary?

A. Generally one would not have to dock the tail of baby pigs if only a few pigs are penned together or if pigs are raised outdoors in a pasture situation.

Q. Is docking a baby pig's tail considered to be a painful process for the baby pig?

A. No. When baby pigs' tails are docked, you see very little evidence of pain in the pig in terms of flinching or squealing. This is particularly true if the tail is docked at a very early age of one to three days.

## Supporting Activities

Meeting topics which support this activity include:

Caring for the Newborn Pig  
Clipping a Pig's Needle Teeth  
Giving Iron to Your Pig  
Castrating Your Pig  
Identifying Pig Litter Mates