

# Just the Facts!

## Clipping Show Pigs

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### Introduction

Fitting swine for show is not new. Proper washing, cleaning, and brushing make the pig more appealing to the judge. These also instill the concepts of pig care and handling, personal responsibility, and work ethic in the youth. In the past, along with proper cleaning, youth were taught to trim long hair growth around the sheath of barrows, along the teat line of gilts, around the ears and jowls and on the switch of the tail to provide a more uniform appearance of the hair across the pig's body without hampering the value of the pig carcass. Today, the vast majority of show pigs have their entire body clipped or shaved in an attempt to enhance the appearance of the pig in the eye of the judge. Body clipping or shaving has replaced conventional fitting techniques, which reduces the learning opportunities and caretaking responsibilities of the youth. Perhaps the largest impact of body clipping and shaving is that it reduces the value of the pig to the packer and may lead to concerns regarding the pig's welfare. This fact sheet will address the process of hair removal, the impact of body clipping or shaving on the value and welfare of the pig, and provide suggestions for fitting swine projects.

### Current Situation

Total body clipping or shaving has increased due to a variety of reasons, including:

1. Perception of increased muscularity of the loin and ham
2. Attempting to create a youthful appearance or mask the true age
3. Judges commenting on and choosing pigs that are body clipped over those that are not
4. Competition among peers, and
5. Attempts by breeders to establish and maintain competitive markets for show pigs.

Body clipping adds no true value to the pig at the farm, packing plant, or consumer levels. Body clipping has only negative impacts on a pig's value across all segments of the swine industry, representing a large economic loss to packers and processors.

### Packer Perspective

Almost all swine carcasses in the United States are de-haired during the harvest process, with the exception of a few plants that manually skin carcasses. Carcasses are de-haired to remove sources of harmful organisms that may influence food safety and to prepare the carcass for further processing. Packers rely on efficiency in the harvest process, thus any situation that slows down the harvest process costs the packer money. Body clipped or shaved carcasses reduce harvest speed because the short hair from clipped or shaved carcasses is not easily or completely removed in the de-hairing process. This results in carcasses that do not pass inspection. Carcasses that cannot be de-haired automatically must be hand-trimmed, increasing the labor costs per carcass and reducing carcass weight and value of pork cuts.

### Pig Perspective

Body clipping or shaving has negative implications on the pig. Because restraint is common when body clipping or shaving, the pig is exposed to unnecessary stress. Stress decreases pig performance and may be viewed as inhumane. In addition, the pig's hair helps regulate thermal and environmental comfort. In the colder months, hair removal can cause chilling which can lead to sickness and poor performance. In warmer months, hair removal can lead to sunburn on exposed skin, susceptibility to insect bites, skin irritations and reduced performance.

### Implications

The combination of economic losses due to efficiency and product quality has made some packers unwilling to purchase pigs from the show industry. This creates a significant problem for youth who wish to market swine through traditional market channels. Also, consumers and industry affiliates may view hair clipping and shaving practices as unfriendly to animals. The best plan is to avoid any alteration of hair on the pig and raise the pig under the best environmental and management conditions possible.