

Ohio Science Education Standards Grade 3: Life Sciences: Heredity

Compare the life cycles of different animals including birth to adulthood, reproduction and death.

(e.g., egg–tadpole–frog, egg–caterpillar–chrysalis–butterfly)

The swine industry has made significant changes in recent years. About 40 years ago, farmers kept a few sows and fed the baby pigs until they reached market weight. Today hog farmers may own several hundred hogs. Of course, one farmer cannot take care of that many pigs, so people who own large numbers of pigs hire other people to manage their pigs for them.

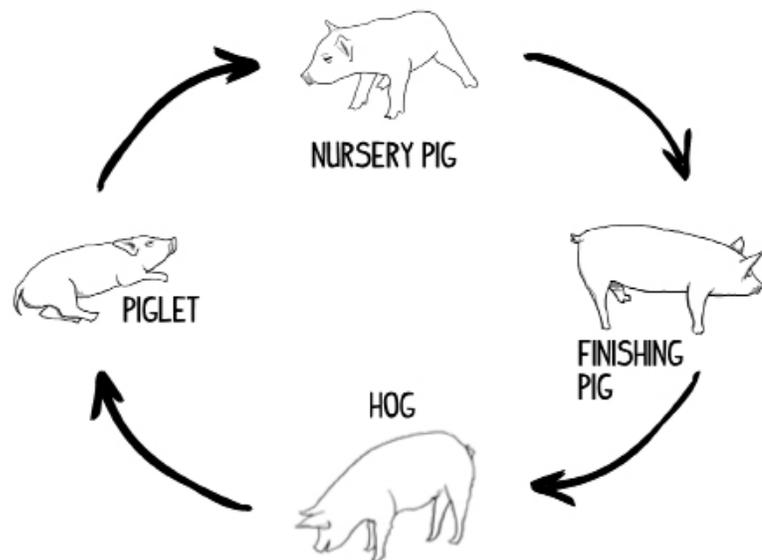
In this video, Jackie’s job responsibilities on the farm are in the farrowing room, taking care of the mother sows and piglets. She is concerned about the health and welfare of the animals. Heat, warmth, safety and nursing piglets are the most important considerations for her on Day 1 and for the first 3 weeks of a baby pig’s life.

THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PIG

The pig is first a piglet, then a weaner (nursery pig), then a gilt or barrow (finishing pig). Mature male swine are called boars and female swine are sows. Sows can be bred by natural mating or by artificial insemination. Gestation (pregnancy) lasts for three months, three weeks and three days.

One-year-old sows can give birth to litters of pigs twice a year. A litter usually has eight to twelve baby pigs, each weighing about three pounds. Giving birth to baby pigs is called farrowing.

The cycle of life begins with the birth of the piglet in the farrowing room. Farrowing pens or stalls are designed to provide a place for the sow to give birth and to protect newborn pigs.



Baby pigs are carefully observed to keep mortality to a minimum and to ensure rapid early growth and development. Newborn piglets need special attention because they are born with little stored energy, have little ability to regulate their own body temperature and can easily be injured by the sow. Baby pigs appear very greedy when they are competing for food from their mothers. For this reason the words “pig” and “hog” have come to be associated with greedy behavior.

Pigs are generally weaned at two to four weeks of age when they weigh ten to fifteen pounds. These nursery pigs move to a separate facility and receive a more complete diet consisting of corn, wheat and soybean meal.

At eight to ten weeks (forty to sixty pounds) pigs are moved to finishing facilities where they are housed until they reach about 240 pounds. After that they are called hogs. Hogs are usually taken to market when they weigh 240–280 pounds and are about five to six months old.

MANY BREEDS OF PIGS

Swine come in many shapes, sizes, and colors. Swine that are alike in color patterns and body structure often belong to the same breed. Breeds can be combined in several planned ways to create market hogs. Some farms specialize in one breed of pig. Most pigs raised today are a combination of two or three different breeds for the best traits from each breed.

Yorkshire hogs are white in color and have erect ears. They are the most popular breed in the United States and Canada. Yorkshires are known to grow quickly, have many piglets and produce very lean, high quality pork. Durocs are red pigs with drooping ears. Durocs range from a very light golden color to a very dark mahogany color. Durocs have high quality muscle with an ability to grow fast. Hampshire hogs are black with a white belt across the shoulders. Hampshires are a heavily muscled, lean-meat breed. Landrace swine are white in color with droopy ears. They are large sows, known for their ability to farrow and raise large litters.

RESOURCES

National swine registry and information on swine breeds.
nationalswine.com