

## Tattooing Pigs by Bill Howes

### Equipment

- An assistant
- Marker spray
- Tattoo kit & ink
- Old toothbrush
- Pen & paper
- Old feedbag for testing numbers
- Hurdles to confine the pigs
- Any vaccines, wormers etc you may wish to administer at the same time.

### What we do is:

We select litters for tattooing when their ears are big enough to take the HDL letters and numbers. Because we use quite large tattoos, this means tattooing at 6-8 weeks' old but if you are using smaller tattoos then the pigs can be done at 3-4 weeks old when they are easier to handle.

Gather all of the equipment needed as close as possible to the pen of pigs. Make sure you can't lose the letters/numbers in the bedding if dropped.

Sort out the first letters/numbers and test on an old feedbag. It is very easy to put them upside down or back to front!

Remove the sow. However quiet she may normally be, she will strongly object to your manhandling her young and they DO squeal.

Confine the litter in a corner with clean bedding. This way they can easily be caught by the back leg.

The assistant has already written the sequence of numbers on the paper – it speeds up the process slightly and is less messy!

Spray the boars with a spot on the bum. These should be marked first.

The handler holds the pig by the back legs and the assistant counts the teats, checks the placement of them and looks for blind ones. Write the results, good, bad or indifferent against the corresponding number for that pig. Also note whether it is a boar or a gilt.

With the boars check that both testicles are in place and there are no hernias or other faults.

The handler cradles the pig in his arms and the assistant worms and vaccinates as appropriate.

The assistant then coats the toothbrush with ear-marking paste and rubs it well into the inside of the pig's right ear (as you look at the pig from above). Some will also add paste to the tattoo needles.

Align the tattooing pliers so that the head of it is within the ear. Squeeze hard so that the tattoo pins penetrate well into the ear (you should hear a 'crunching' sound!).

Re-coat the toothbrush with ink and apply to the outside of the pig's left ear.

Repeat the ear-marking process.

With the toothbrush again coated in ink, rub vigorously inside and outside of both ears of that the ink can soak into the perforations.

Spray mark the head end of the pig. This may sound unnecessary, but when they huddle together, the ink gets rubbed onto other pigs and it is difficult to tell who's been done and who has not.



**It should be noted that this is what we do. Adaptations should be made to suit your own circumstances.**

*(Photos by Marlene Renshaw)*



*Get plenty of paste on the brush*



*Apply paste to the tattoo needles*



*Get plenty of paste on the ear*



*Squeeze the pliers hard*



*Apply more paste to the perforations*

