

Identify Pigs by Ear Notching

Revised by Craig Painter and Jason L. Turner¹

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Figure 1. A V-notcher (left) used to notch the ears of small piglets for identification (right). (Photos courtesy of Craig Painter.)

An accurate set of records on swine performance is one of the best management tools a producer can have. In order to keep such records, producers must be able to identify pigs from birth.

The successful manager clips the needle teeth and navel cords as soon after birth as possible. This also offers an opportune time for identification. The simplest method and the one recommended by most breed associations is ear notching. The most common notching system is the 1-3-9 system. For piglets of this size, a small (3/16- to 1/4-inch-deep) V-notcher is recommended (Figure 1). If this is your first time ear notching pigs, consult your county Extension agent (<https://aces.nmsu.edu/county/>) or an experienced swine producer in your area for assistance to help you develop this skill.

Litter Mark: The right ear is used for the litter mark, and all pigs in the same litter must have the same notches in this ear. The right ear is on the pig's own right. The litter mark ear is divided into five sections, and each section has a numerical value, either 1, 3, 9, 27, or 81 (Figure 2). Each section, except for 81, can have 1 or 2 notches only.

Individual Pig Marks: The left ear is used for notches to show an individual pig's number in the litter. Each pig will have different notches in the left ear. The left ear is divided into three sections, with values of 1, 3, and 9 (Figure 2).

To develop a number, make notches in different parts of the ear in such a way that their numerical values will add up to the desired number. For proper identification to be made, it is essential that the notches be placed in the appropriate area of the ear so that the mark is clearly a 1 versus a 3, or a 9 versus a 27.

Figure 1 shows the proper technique for using a V-notcher. Figure 3 provides examples of ear notches using the 1-3-9 system, and Figure 4 provides examples to help you practice using ear notches.

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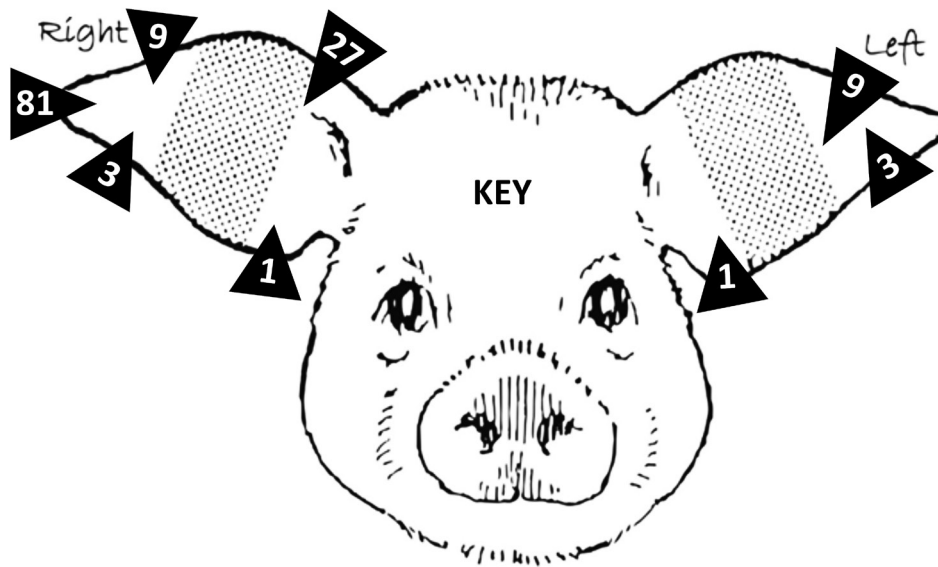


Figure 2. Numerical values for different ear notch sections in the 1-3-9 system. The hatched area represents the area where notches should not be placed to avoid confusing #1 with #3, etc. (Drawing courtesy of Craig Painter, modified by Sue Miller.)

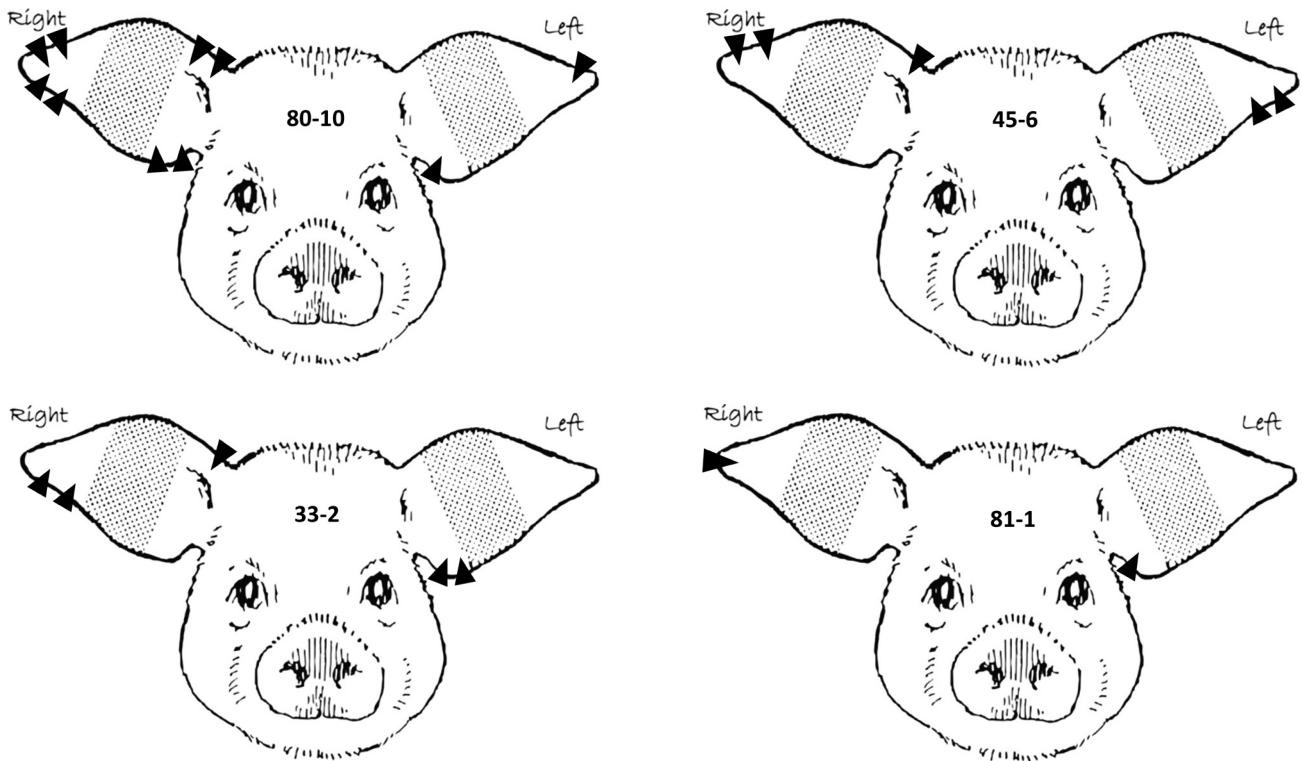
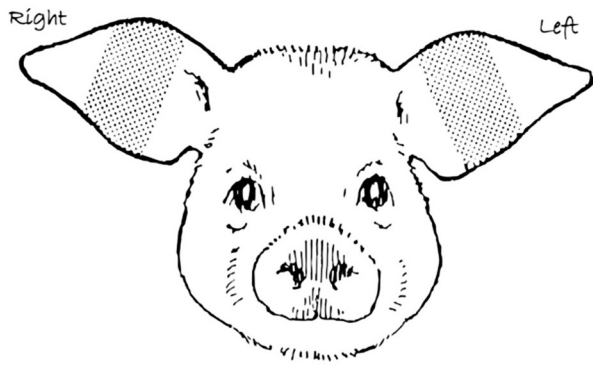
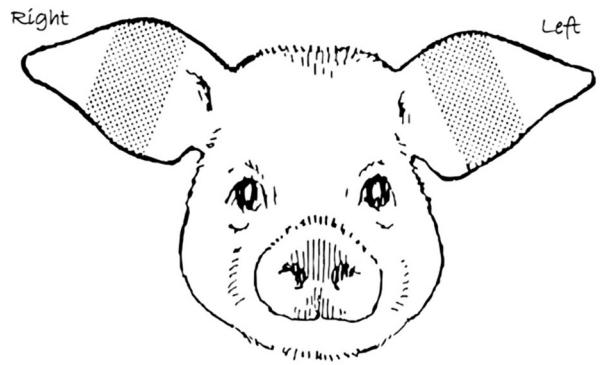


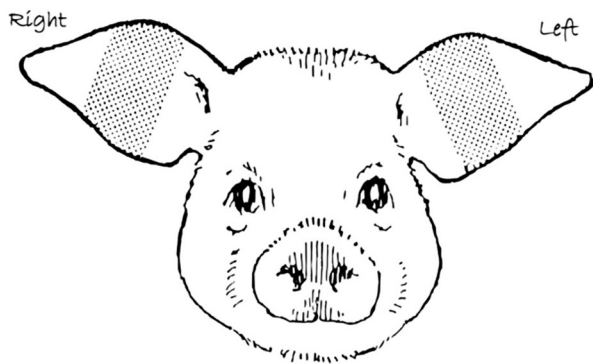
Figure 3. Examples of litter (left number; right pig ear when viewed from behind the pig) and individual pig (right number; left pig ear when viewed from behind the pig) ear notch numbers. (Drawing courtesy of Craig Painter, modified by Sue Miller.)



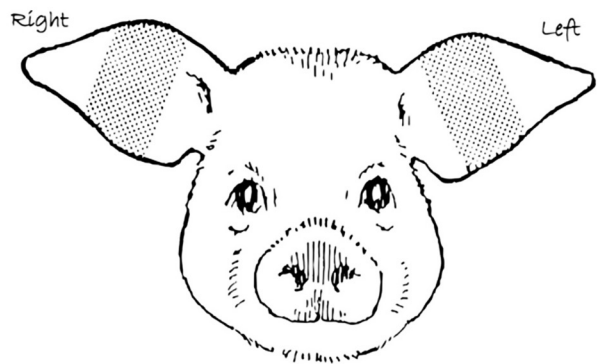
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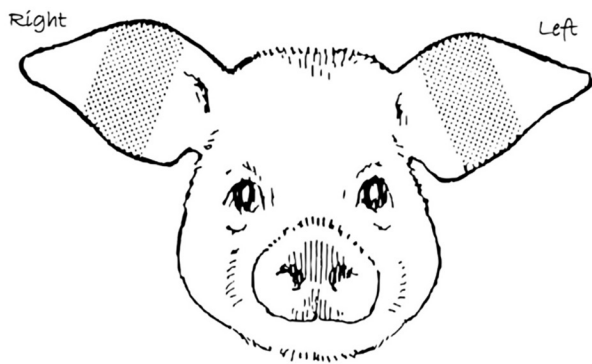
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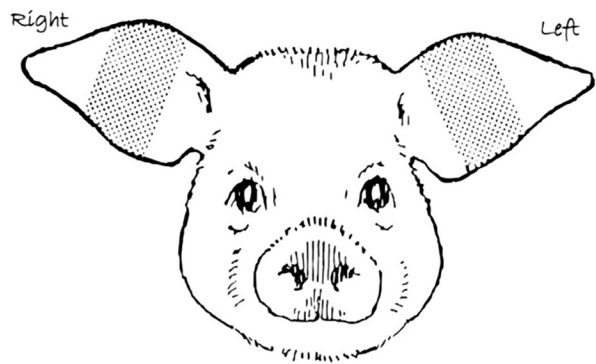
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100-5



19-7



12-6

Figure 4. Practice examples: For the illustrations, draw in the marks that represent the numbers indicated below each pig's face.

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