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## Feral/Wild Pigs: Potential Problems for Farmers and Hunters

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at risk when they field-dress and butcher wild pigs and should take the following precautions:

1. Always wear disposable plastic or rubber gloves when field-dressing, cleaning, and butchering a wild pig carcass. Avoid direct contact with blood and reproductive organs.
2. As soon as possible, wash hands with soap and hot water after dressing wild pigs.
3. Burn or bury gloves and remains from butchered wild pigs.
4. Cook wild pig meat thoroughly.

The symptoms of swine brucellosis in humans are not distinctive enough for a clear-cut diagnosis. Most people report recurring fever, chills, sweating, weakness, headaches, pains in muscles or joints, loss of appetite, and weight loss. People with these symptoms who have been exposed to wild pigs should consult their doctor about swine brucellosis.

### **Pseudorabies**

Another important disease harbored by wild pigs is pseudorabies. Despite its name, this disease, caused by a herpesvirus, is not related to rabies and does not affect people. However, pseudorabies is of great economic importance to the domestic swine industry. It weakens pigs, leaving them susceptible to other problems, and causes abortions and stillbirths.

A cooperative State, Federal, and industry program managed by the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has eradicated pseudorabies from commercial-production swine herds in the United States. Because commercial-production swine are now free of pseudorabies, reinfection via feral pig exposure would be economically devastating to the pork industry.

Adult swine can be silent carriers of pseudorabies and will periodically shed the virus through the nose and mouth. Once infected, the pig is a lifetime carrier, and there is no effective treatment. Pseudorabies can be detected by blood testing, and evidence of pseudorabies infection in wild pigs has been found in at least 11 States.

Pseudorabies is a fatal disease in other farm animals, such as cattle, sheep, and goats, and in dogs and cats. Wild mammals, such as raccoons,

skunks, foxes, opossums, and small rodents, also can be fatally infected. The virus attacks the nervous system in these animals and can produce intense itching followed by paralysis and death. Although people are not directly at risk, hunters need to know that their dogs could become fatally infected through exposure to wild pigs with pseudorabies.

To minimize the threat wild pigs pose to domestic swine operations, farmers should take the following precautions:

1. Do not introduce wild pigs into herds or attempt to market pigs caught in the wild.
2. Before transporting breeding swine, have blood tests performed according to State or Federal guidelines.
3. Blood-test all new stock before adding them to the existing herd.
4. Fence out feral and wild pigs from areas with domestic swine.
5. Do not butcher wild pigs on the farm or feed offal from field-dressed wild pigs to domestic swine.

Both State and Federal laws govern disease control programs for swine brucellosis and pseudorabies in all classes and types of swine. Relocating wild pigs without negative blood tests for these diseases violates the law. Before wild



**Figure 3—** Before you move wild pigs, get them blood-tested by a veterinarian to be sure they are free from diseases that could be transmitted to domestic pigs or people.



**Figure 4—** Cage traps are effective in trapping wild hogs, especially when food supplies are limited, as in winter.

pigs are moved, they should be blood-tested by a veterinarian to certify that they are free from disease.

Wild pigs are highly adaptable, prolific animals. Thus, wild pig control requires a sustained and integrated approach, which may include various forms of exclusion fencing and cage traps, plus ground shooting, trained hunting dogs, and aerial hunting. Check State laws and regulations concerning feral or wild pig hunting permits, if required, for the various control techniques. Individuals should contact their State Veterinarian or the Wildlife Services unit of APHIS before moving wild pigs intrastate or interstate.

Following the sanitary procedures outlined in this brochure is important to prevent human infection with swine brucellosis and to make sure that this disease, pseudorabies, and other potential infections do not make their way into farm livestock and companion animals from infected feral pigs. The following Web sites are available for additional information about wild pigs:

APHIS:  
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/programs/programs.html>

Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study:  
<http://www.uga.edu/scwds>

Texas Animal Health Commission:  
<http://www.taahc.state.tx.us>

Noble Foundation:  
<http://www.noble.org>

You may also phone APHIS' Wildlife Services toll free at 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) for assistance in dealing with feral pigs.



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

## Feral/Wild Pigs: Potential Problems for Farmers and Hunters

Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 799

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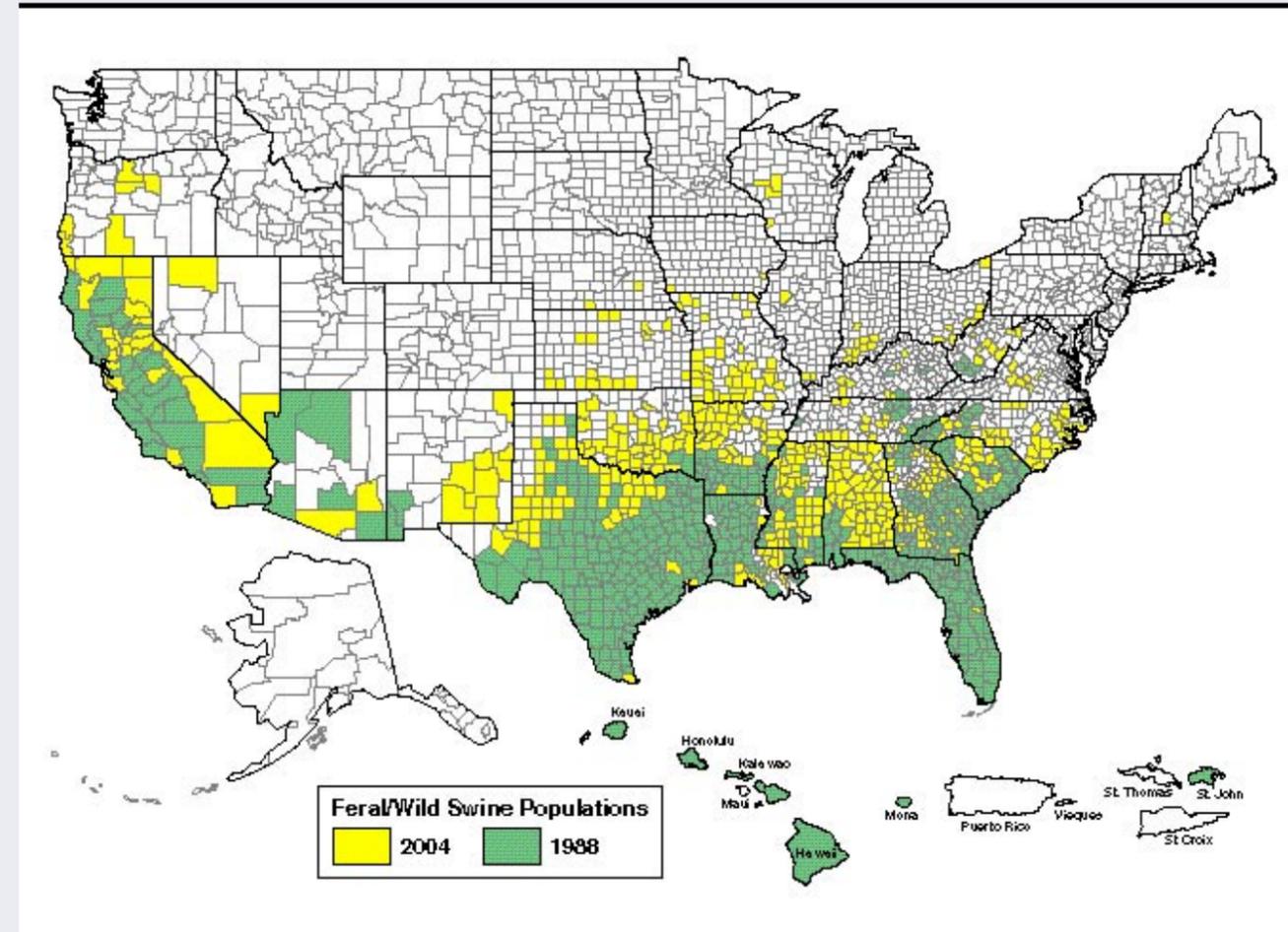


Free-ranging populations of wild pigs (also called feral swine) exist in at least 39 States in this country. Some experts estimate their numbers at over 4 million, with the largest populations located in California, Florida, Hawaii, and Texas.

Hunters, farmers, and landowners need to be aware of the extensive damage wild pigs can cause to their property and livestock. The rooting and wallowing activities of wild pigs cause serious erosion to river

banks and areas along streams. These destructive animals have been known to tear through livestock and game fences and consume animal feed, minerals, and protein supplements.

Not only do wild pigs feast on field crops such as corn, milo, rice, watermelon, peanuts, hay, turf and wheat, but they are also efficient predators and—when given the opportunity—will prey upon young livestock and other small animals.



**Figure 1**—In 1998, feral swine could be found in parts of all the counties shown here in green. By 2004, wild pigs had increased their range to counties shown in yellow, while remaining in the green-colored areas as well. Note that wild pigs are now found in two counties in Iowa—America’s #1 swine-producing State. (Map adapted from originals created by the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, Athens, GA.)

### Wild Pig, Russian Boar, Razorback, Piney-Woods Rooter...

Wild pigs in the United States are referred to by many names, largely because of their mixed ancestry. Wild pigs are not native to the United States and should not be confused with the collared peccary (javelina) of the Southwest. Swine were first introduced to the United States in 1539, when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto brought them to Florida. After that, it was common practice for settlers to allow their domestic swine to roam freely. Many years later, sport hunters introduced true Eurasian wild boars

into certain areas of the United States, and their bloodlines have become mixed with those of the wild pig.

The feral swine population that exists today is a combination of domestic, escaped, or neglected domestic swine, Eurasian wild boar, or feral pigs that have been captured for the purpose of starting wild, free-living populations.

The intentional movement of trapped feral pigs has resulted in extensive crossbreeding of feral populations, producing variations in appearance. Wild pigs today are often hybrids: some look like wild boars, and others look more like the common domestic pig in body shape and color. It is often difficult to distinguish wild pigs from domestic swine based on appearance alone.



**Figure 2**—Wild pigs don’t all look alike. Some take after the Eurasian wild boar (top left); others (bottom left) look almost like domestic pigs. The javelina, or collared peccary (above) is native to the Southwestern United States.

### Important Diseases

Wild pigs are susceptible to several serious swine diseases: swine brucellosis, pseudorabies, classical swine fever, and African swine fever.

African swine fever—a major foreign animal disease—has never been found in the United States. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) eradicated classical swine fever (formerly known as hog cholera) from this country in 1976. Although swine brucellosis and pseudorabies have been eliminated from U.S. commercial-production swine herds, hunters and farmers need to be aware that wild pigs may be infected with these diseases and can readily transmit them to domestic pigs. Moving untested wild pigs to new areas or allowing them onto farms that have domestic pigs is illegal and can have disastrous consequences.

#### Swine Brucellosis

Swine brucellosis is caused by bacteria very similar to the organism that causes brucellosis in cattle, and both diseases are a public health concern. Swine brucellosis causes abortions in sows and infertility in boars. Although this disease does not kill pigs outright, it causes losses in reproduction that decrease profits for swine producers.

The swine brucellosis organism is transmitted in reproductive discharges, particularly the afterbirth, from infected sows or in semen from infected boars. Infected swine are disease carriers for life, and there is no effective treatment. Detecting infected swine through blood tests and culling these animals is the only way to remove the disease from the herd.

Swine brucellosis has been reported in wild pig populations in at least 14 States based primarily on serological prevalence. The disease can be spread to domestic swine if wild pigs are introduced into local herds. Introduction could be intentional, or wild pigs could break into pastures or pens to breed with domestic sows.

Pigs infected with swine brucellosis can serve as a source of infection to domestic animals. Cattle can also become infected if they come in close contact with infected wild pigs.

Humans can get swine brucellosis through handling infected tissues of wild pigs. Hunters are