

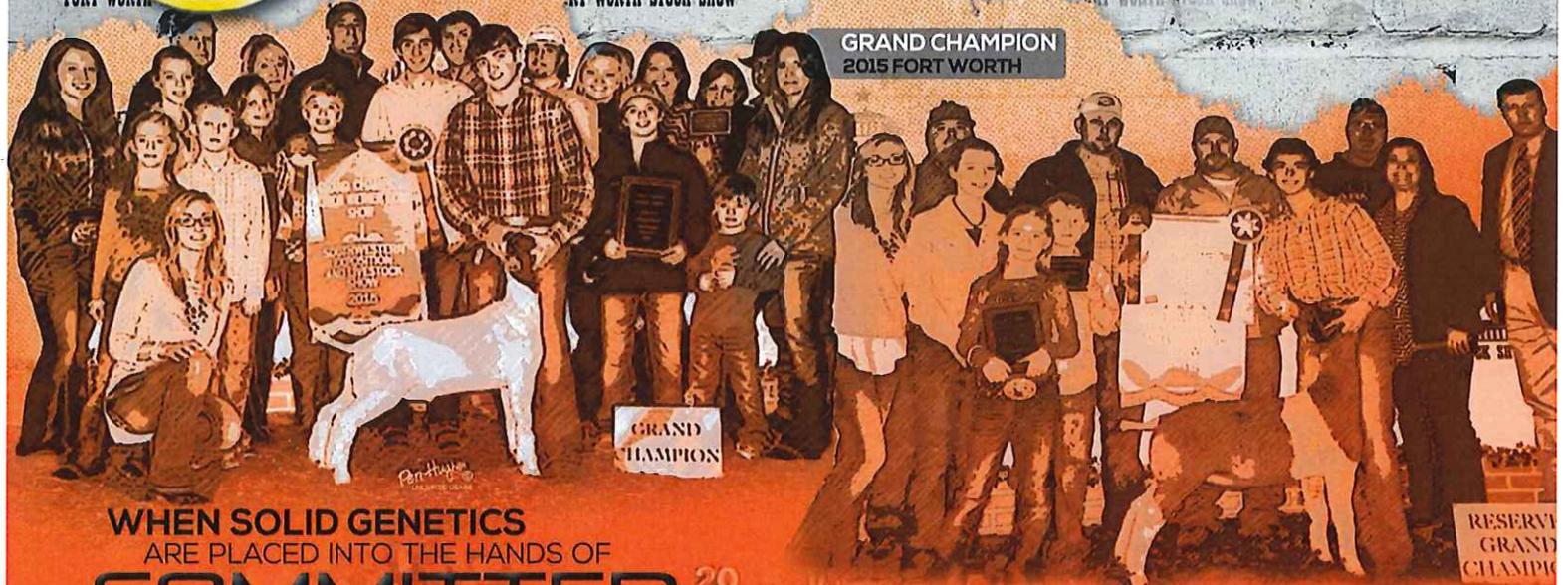


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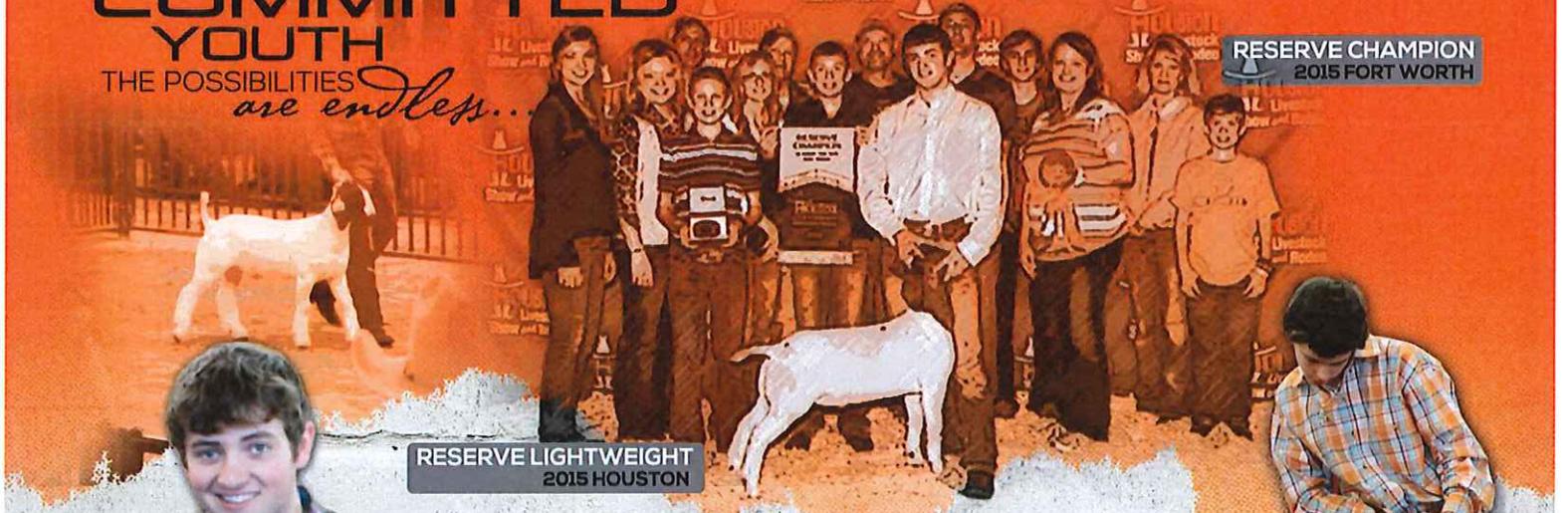


GRAND CHAMPION
2015 FORT WORTH

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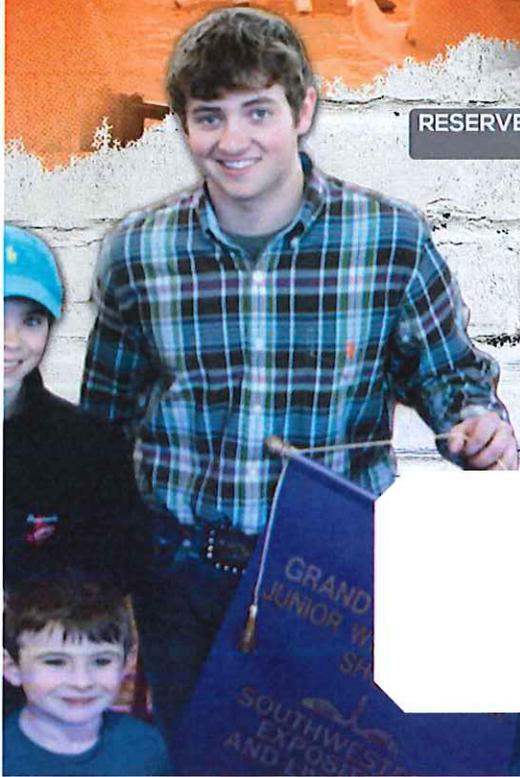
RESERVE GRAND CHAMPION

WHEN SOLID GENETICS
ARE PLACED INTO THE HANDS OF
COMMITTED
YOUTH
THE POSSIBILITIES
are endless...

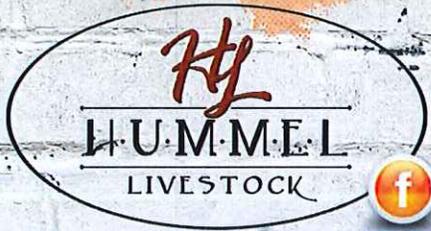


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YOUR LIVESTOCK PROJECTS DON'T HIBERNATE IN THE WINTER, DO YOU?

by Ashlei Mason and Brandon Freel

As I was pondering what to write about this month, I walked outside to grab something out of the car and just about lost my breath when I felt the cold winter wind hit me as I opened the door. I looked up and saw the grey sky and the dogs were humped up in the corner by the brick that was blocking the northern wind. I quickly ran out back to check on the little pigs that are just a little older than eight weeks old to make sure the heat lamps were on, the water wasn't frozen and to listen for any unusual coughs or noises. All of the babies were do-

ing good and not freezing, although a few were somewhat fuzzy. This weather was not a surprise to me, even though it startled me upon stepping out the door. I have a weather application on my phone and I make sure and check it each day. I had prepared for the weather and cleaned and bedded pens before the cold front hit with shavings and straw. I had put down blankets and put out extra food for the dogs as well.

It was all I could do to keep from sitting there and thinking about the pigs all night wondering if they were too cold for comfort. Then, I couldn't help but think about the other poor pigs that live outside in the harsh weather with no heater or heat lamps. But, then I remembered that as my parents taught me, no matter what the condition or the shelter, there is no excuse as to why they can't be almost as comfortable as you are in your own house. There are so many ways to make a pig's home cozy if you will just think for a bit. We have written several articles about preparing for colder weather and beating the summer heat. But, in addition to our tips you will see later in this article, I wanted to talk about feeding, watering and managing your livestock project no matter what the circumstance or weather is outside. I saw something the other day on Facebook that really hit home. A very successful breeder wrote, "You probably don't feel like you need or want to go check on your pigs in the snow and ice, but the truth is, you should check on them more often than ever in these brutal temperatures."

While growing up, I knew of several people in the community that would wait until 4 p.m. in the winter to go check the pigs because it was just too cold that morning to get out before work. Or, they said the pigs will be too cold to eat anyhow. Well, the truth of it is, your animal project should be on a schedule as we have discussed many times in the past. Once they are used to that schedule, they expect to be fed and watered at that time whether it is 100 degrees or 12 degrees out. Do you eat when it is cold and hot or do you go hungry? Do you still drink water and liquids throughout the day if it is cold or hot? I believe that we all continue to eat and drink no matter what the temperature is. We have more clothes to put on if it is cold, we grab a jacket, a scarf and gloves and meet our friends for

lunch. Your livestock projects should get the same treatment! I know of several people that double feed if a cold front is coming in. What does this lead to? The pigs get off schedule, but primarily, they will probably over eat and get loose or have diarrhea from gorging if they aren't used to that much intake.

With colder temperatures, much like humans, there are lots of sicknesses that come along with the colder temperatures. Just in the few short months that people have had pigs on feed this fall, I have walked in the barns and have seen and heard all sorts of things, several that were very scary. Obviously if pigs are not eating their rations and are off feed, that typically means that they are getting sick and need an antibiotic of some sort. It is best not to wait and be proactive. Because going off feed could mean several things, you have to look to see if they are coughing, have diarrhea, look lethargic, etc. The most common among these that is often overlooked is symptoms of the flu. Pigs are typically fuzzy when it is cold, but when they look puny and aren't vigorous; you better take a closer look. If their ears are pinned back and their eyes are pussy, these are definite signs of the flu. The obvious diagnosis is the labored breathing or thumping and not eating. We have to look past that and see what kind of problem we have going on AND stay in the barn long enough to identify a problem. Much like my term, "drive by feeder". You cannot be a "drive by vet" either.

EXTRA STEPS TO HELP YOU KEEP ANIMALS WARM:

1. Hang a heat lamp (and not from the ceiling). The most obvious way to help keep your pigs warm is to hang a heat lamp in their pen (maybe even two lamps if you can). However, many times we see that the purpose of the heat lamp has been defeated because of the height that it was hung. It needs to be hung to where when the pig is standing up it is 12-18 inches above their back. At that height they are able to feel the heat from the lamp but it is high enough where they can't get to it. The most important thing when hanging a heat lamp is to **MAKE SURE** that it and its cord are secured with a piece of wire, a zip tie, string, or anything that will prevent it from falling into the shavings and starting a fire. **THAT IS IMPERATIVE!!!!**

2. Block any wind or draft. We really believe that making sure that there is no wind or cold air draft is just as important, if not more important, than what the actual air temperature is. We have bought out our local hardware store of the spray foam, or as we call it, the "good stuff" to fill in any cracks or holes in our barns. Be sure to block as much wind/draft as possible or build a space in their pen where they can lay down where the wind is blocked. You can get a lot done with blue tarps and plywood!

3. Build a hut. If you have an open barn/pen but have the ability to build a little "hut" with a low roof on one end where it can have complete solid sides with a small door/opening for them to go in and out of, that will keep them really warm.

4. Put out straw. Pigs can stay a lot warmer in cold weather if you bust some straw in their pens and they can bury themselves in it. You might go out tomorrow morning and see nothing but little ears sticking up out of the straw, but they will be warm and happy! Just **BE SURE** that if your pig builds a bed underneath the heat lamp that there isn't anyway the heat lamp and straw can touch.

These are just a few small things that we suggest to help keep your pigs warm. We like to try and keep the babies at 75-80 degrees. Obviously, as pigs get bigger they can handle colder temperatures better but we can't stress how important it is to keep them as warm as possible. They will eat better, convert better and look better when they are comfortable!