



# Genetic Modifications: Micro Pigs Make Debut In China

TN Note: Some scientists are already talking about modifying human DNA to create smaller humans in an effort to fight climate change. (see [Scientists: Genetically Modified Humans Can Fight Climate Change](#)) With the advent of “micro-pigs”, the possibility moves closer.

Have you been pining for a “teacup” pig but worried that the supposedly petite porcine pet might grow as big as your bathtub?

A Chinese biotech firm says it now has the answer: a genetically modified swine that tops out around 33 pounds.

BGI, a company based in the southern city of Shenzhen that is known for its work sequencing human, plant and animal DNA, recently announced that it intends to start selling \$1,600 miniature pigs that it initially created as laboratory models for studying human ailments.

The pigs created a splash late last month when BGI showed them at the Shenzhen International Biotech Leaders Summit. The pint-size porkers

were created through a process known as gene editing. Rather than introduce another organism's DNA into the pigs, scientists "edit" the swine's own genetic material, disabling a copy of the growth hormone receptor gene so that cells don't get a signal to grow.

Swine-loving celebrities will have to wait for further innovation for truly purse-portable pigs (Miley Cyrus' Bubba Sue and Paris Hilton's Princess Pigelette are more than a handful, while George Clooney's 18-year companion, Max, grew to 250 pounds before he died in 2006).

But animal breeders and advocates say the prospect of even a 33-pound pig could reduce the problem of people abandoning pet swine that pack on the pounds beyond their owners' expectations. Curt Mills, a board member of the Southern California Assn. for Miniature Potbellied Pigs, says four regional shelters for the animals are all at capacity, with about 150 oinkers looking for homes.

"Pigs are good pets, but a lot of issue is the size," said Patty Morrisroe, a pig breeder in Dallas, Ore., who says she has spent 30 years selectively breeding swine to produce pigs she calls "Royal Dandies" and "Dandie Extremes" that can be around 39 pounds full grown. But with just four breeding sows, her litters are limited — about 20 piglets a year — and she charges \$2,500 to \$5,500 per animal.

"If you could immediately make a small pig, it would be very cool, but there are still a lot of questions," she said.

Kenneth Bondioli, a professor of animal sciences at Louisiana State University, said BGI's gene-edited micro pigs would need to be evaluated to see if they develop healthily and to determine whether they would could harm the environment or other livestock if they were released or escaped. It is unclear whether BGI intends to offer its pigs for sale outside China, but if Americans wanted them, U.S. regulators would have to determine whether they could be imported.

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