

Handling Pigs - Work Smarter, Not Harder!



Pigs can be challenging animals to move and handle. Aggressive pigs, stubborn pigs and frightened or stressed pigs all add their own unique challenges.

It is well proven that people who invest in learning proper pig handling techniques can save themselves a lot of time and money (in improved pork quality). Honestly, just reducing your frustration and making a difficult job easier makes it worth it. Here are some tips for moving and handling pigs with less stress - good for the pigs and the people!

1. Use pig behaviour to move animals: think about the animals.

- Pigs have poor vision. It's even worse if they have long, floppy ears.
- Pigs have a blind spot directly behind them and can't see you if you walk up behind them.
- Pigs have a good sense of smell, are curious and like to chew.
- Pigs have good hearing - they communicate with each other using a complex vocabulary of grunts and squeals.
- Pigs like to travel in groups - it is recommended that pigs be moved in small groups (5-6). If you try to move large groups of pigs, the ones at the front will turn back.
- Pigs don't like being moved individually or left alone and will be unpredictable when handled.



2. Stay calm.

- Patience is key when moving pigs. With gentle encouragement, pigs will move forward as they explore the new environment. Pigs will explore as they go - they will investigate unique lighting, smells, surfaces, sounds and other animals.
- If you try to rush the pigs they can get stressed. Once this happens, they form a scrum and stick together. They will become less predictable and will turn and try to go back the way they came.
- Rough, aggressive treatment will cause pigs to panic and be difficult to move.
- Don't yell! Research shows people who don't make a sound move animals fastest.

3. Design or modify your facility to encourage pigs to move in the desired direction.

- Give pigs only one way to go. Install solid sides along aisle ways and chutes so that pigs focus in front, encouraging the pig to move forward.
- Pigs dislike moving up and down ramps - eliminate or minimize their use.
- Lighting should be uniform - shadows and bright spots should be minimized. Pigs will balk at shadows.
- Non-slip flooring will improve pig movement and reduce injuries from falls.
- Handling facilities should be painted one uniform colour. Pigs will balk at a sudden change of floor colour or floor type.

The right tools, for the right job.....

The right handling aids for moving pigs:

- Pig boards
- Paddles
- Witches capes
- Construction flags



Why not use an electric prod?

- A study carried out in Manitoba clearly demonstrated the link between improper handling and animal welfare. Pigs were exposed to three treatments; they were either handled gently, aggressively or aggressively with the use of the electric prod. The highest number of downed animals were recorded with the use of the electric prod (34%).
- Electric prods have a severe affect on the animal causing both pain stress and fear stress. When goaded, pigs can stop, turn sideways, scream and, in extreme circumstances, can collapse.
- Stop and think about your actions: Does prodding a pig at the back of a group help make the lead pig move?

Did you know...?

- Electric prods are banned in the barns of most large meat processing plants in North America.
- Stress can increase the incidence of pale, soft, exudative (PSE) or dry, firm, dark (DFD) meat; both results mean poor meat quality and poor animal welfare.

For more information or additional copies, please contact any of the groups listed below:

For more information:
www.livestockwelfare.com
www.grandin.com

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