

Appendix 4: Understanding Pig Behaviour

Attitude:

Pigs that are handled with a positive attitude perform better. The best stockpeople:

- Like their pigs
- Are determined to meet the pig's needs
- Have a good understanding of the requirements of their pigs, and
- Can translate this understanding through their handling practices into a high level of care which results in a high level of pig health, welfare and performance.

Sorting and Moving Pigs – Stay calm:

Calm pigs are easier to handle and move than excited animals. Animals that become agitated and excited bunch together and are more difficult to separate and sort. If animals become agitated or excited, allowing them to calm down for a few minutes will make them easier to handle.

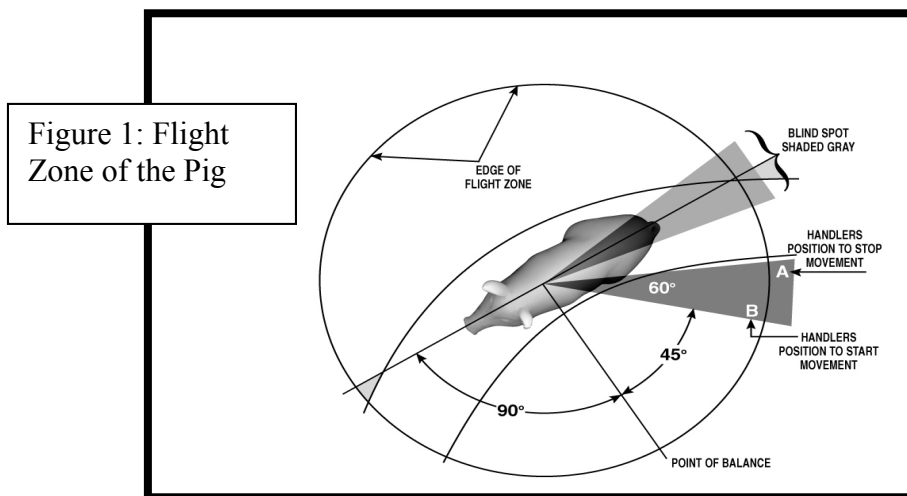
Pig Behaviour:

Many aspects of handling cause stress in pigs. Separation from familiar pen mates, mixing with new animals, new environments, exposure to new sounds and equipment, changes in temperature and ventilation cause stress.

Understanding pig behaviour will help you with your job and enable you to be able to move pigs quickly and efficiently while reducing the stress to the pigs during loading and unloading.

- Loading and unloading will be a novel (new) experience for many pigs. Novel experiences produce fear in pigs - especially if they have not experienced frequent human contact.

- Pigs **don't** like having to move up and down ramps; pigs **do** like to play follow the leader. If you can get the lead pig moving, the rest will follow if given time. Let the leader pig lead, don't try and force pigs up or down ramps.
- Like all animals (you included), pigs have a flight zone. If someone stands too close to you, you feel uncomfortable and will move away. The same principle applies to the pig – when handlers get into the flight zone, pigs will move away. Pigs that are not accustomed to humans will have a very large flight zone and will react (by squealing and trying to get away) when a handler reaches the perimeter of the flight zone. If you enter too quickly and deeply into the flight zone, the pig will turn back on you. A good handler understands the principles of the flight zone and will use this to guide pigs (Figure 1). **The edge of the flight zone is the best place to be to get pigs to move in the direction you want them to.**



- Pigs are herd animals and will try to stay with the herd. Move pigs in groups by gently encouraging the lead pig. A small, manageable (5 to 8) group of pigs is easier

to move than a large group (remember, the rest will follow the leader). Don't try to move an isolated pig – let the pig rejoin the group and then move the group.

- Pigs have 310° panoramic vision – what they see greatly influences how they behave.
- Pigs have good hearing – they react to loud noises such as yelling and slamming gates. Use your normal speaking voice when working with the pigs.
- Equipment should be designed to reduce noise. Clanging and banging metal parts should be silenced with rubber pads. Air operated equipment should be equipped with mufflers to reduce noise. Hissing air may cause animals to stop and refuse to walk through a facility.
- Hats or coats, hands or arms, chains, drains in the causeway will cause pigs to slow down or stop. Remove the distraction – don't goad the pigs!
- Pigs will want to move from dark to light – however, pigs will not move into bright light such as sunlight or headlights.
- Warm weather contributes to a special set of problems for pigs – a small increase in temperature, when combined with other stressors, can be fatal for pigs. Just like you, pigs will be reluctant to move in hot weather. Do not use bedding in hot weather. Similarly, pigs will be reluctant to leave a warm barn for a cold truck.
- Pigs will fight when mixed, leading to injury. If loading pigs from different farms, use gates to separate.

Slow is fast – be patient. Remember that pigs are not clued into your goal of getting them either on or off the truck – their objectives are different than yours.

Handling Devices:

- Handling devices are for guiding pigs - the use of the pig's behaviour and modifying or manipulating aiseways and loading ramps will make moving pigs less stressful and reduce the reliance on handling devices.
- If needed, handling the pig board is the least threatening device (when used correctly) for moving pigs.
- Handling devices can help move pigs – the improper use of these devices is unacceptable. Prodding wedged or jammed pigs will make things worse – when prodded a pig will attempt to get away, further increasing the jam. Stockpeople must be patient and considerate. Sometimes the best move is to step back and let both the pig and the attendant calm down. If pigs are spooked, it will take 30 minutes to calm them down.
- Electric prods should not be used on-farm for loading or sorting pigs - pigs find the electric prod aversive and will remember this negative experience next time they are moved.
- **Never prod a non-ambulatory/compromised pig.**
- If pigs get jammed in a bottle-neck (door way, etc.) don't prod the back pig. Use the flight zone of the lead pig to get the pigs going.
- Excessive vocalization can signal an overuse of the electric prod. If you have to use an electric prod, look for distractions and/or lighting problems that are causing pigs to balk. Figure 2 provides a list of common distractions which may cause pigs to balk.

- A small nylon flag on the end of a slender flexible stick can work for sorting pigs.

Animals can be easily turned with the flags. A small plastic bag on the end of a stick also works well.

Figure 2: Common distractions which may cause pigs to balk.

Common distractions that impede movement:

- sparkling reflections on puddles
- reflections on smooth metal
- chains that jingle metal clanging or banging
- high pitched noise
- air hissing
- air drafts blowing towards approaching animals
- clothing hung on the fence
- piece of plastic that is moving
- fan blade movement
- see people moving up ahead
- small object (coffee cup) on the floor
- changes in flooring and texture
- drain grate on the floor
- sudden changes in wall colour

- A Matador cape (Figure 3) can be used to move groups of pigs either out of a pen or down an alley. It is made from lightweight plastic cloth and measures 60 in (150cm) long by 30 in (76 cm) high. There is a short stiffener rod on each end of the top. A cape half as long with a single stiffener rod can also be used.

Figure 3: Home-made matador cape for moving pigs.



- A plastic paddle or a small flag can be used for quietly moving pigs.
- Hogs will stop when a solid barrier is placed in front of them because it prevents them from seeing an escape pathway. This is why a portable panel or board is efficient for moving hogs. Handling will be easier if you use a panel. A light aluminum panel with a hinge in the middle is recommended for separating hogs out of a pen. A large flag can be used in place of the panel.
- A slapper, used to make noise by hitting the board or fence, can also be used if pigs are not too excitable. Avoid hitting the animals. Modern, leaner hybrids are more susceptible to bruises and get too excited if they are hit with the slapper. Avoid excessive noise or shouting. Animals that remain calm will be easier to handle. Excited animals will bunch together and be harder to sort.

Compromised Pigs:

- The Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Transportation advises that all animals should be in good physical condition and optimum health prior to loading.
- A pig that is in distress makes loud, deep, gasping sounds. These pigs should be left alone and allowed to recover.
- Act quickly to cool an over-heated pig or it will die. Do not force the pig to run or climb ramps. If possible, move the pig to a cooler environment and wet it down with a fine spray of cool water. **Do not pour cold water on pigs because they could die of shock.**
- Animals that are sick, injured, disabled, fatigued or cannot be moved without causing them additional suffering are not fit for transport.

- Non-ambulatory animals – any animal that due to age, injury, metabolic or systemic disease, etc., is unable to stand or walk without assistance – are one class of compromised animals.
- It is a good idea to survey all animals for fitness to travel before starting to load. Refer to the decision tree “Should this pig be loaded” for detailed descriptions of conditions that require euthanasia and/or a delay in transport. Pigs must be evaluated as per the recommendations on the decision tree.