



D2. Animal Handling

The way in which animals are handled can have a significant impact on production, and productivity and meat quality can both be affected. The most important consideration is stress, which refers to physical or psychological discomfort. Stressful situations such as transportation, for example — cannot be totally avoided in swine production. However, good working knowledge of the causes and consequences of stress will aid workers in reducing stress in the pigs they handle.

Guidelines are available in Publication 1898/E, *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals Pigs*. It provides stockmanship recommendations as well as recommendations for housing, nutrition and transportation. It also contains emergency plans, guidelines for the humane killing of pigs on the farm, wind chill factors during winter transit and a list of reportable diseases in its appendices.

Studies have shown that stressful conditions result in poorer feed conversions, lower pregnancy rates, higher excretion, transmission of food-borne pathogens and decreased immunity. Tail biting, for example, can cause abscesses that may require treatment at the farm and that may cause trim demerits and carcass contamination at the processing plant. Since these factors impact profit as well as food safety, pig producers must make sure that everyone on their staff knows what measures are being taken to minimize stress on their pigs.

- Keep a copy of the *Recommended Code of Practice* on your farm and make it accessible to everyone who works in the barn.
- Consider the use of environmental enrichment devices to minimize stress. However, recognize the risk that introducing these foreign objects pose as regards food safety. Inspect any devices that you are considering using for environmental enrichment, to ensure that there are no parts that may injure your pigs and become embedded in them, thereby causing a food safety hazard.
- Make sure no penned animal is underfed. Provide fresh drinking water at all times. Avoid extremes in temperature and ensure that all animals have enough space to lay down at the same time.
- Check regularly for sick or injured animals and initiate appropriate treatment. Isolate them, if competition is causing undue stress.
- When moving pigs, avoid the use of pipes, canes, tattoo equipment and sharp objects. These implements cause bruising and unnecessary injury. Rather, we recommend using plastic chase boards and pliable canvas slappers.
- When moving pigs, ensure that they will not have access to medicated feeds in alley-ways, holding areas or pens.
- Minimize stress on pregnant and farrowing sows, to minimize shedding of pathogenic organisms.
- Immediately after determining a pig is not salvageable, because of injury or disease, destroy it in a humane manner.
- Limit mixing of animals. Mixing increases stress and, as a result, increases the shedding of pathogenic bacteria. Mixing may also expose untreated animals to chemical residues in the feces and urine of treated animals.



- Ensure that any bedding used during shipping is free of wood preservatives, agricultural chemicals and the feces and urine of treated animals.
- Work with your marketing agency or processor to determine how things such as transport, withholding of feed and resting periods affect carcass quality and the risk of contamination at the processing plant. (On-Farm Quality Assessment Form question #32)
- Remove dead stock promptly to minimize the risk of contamination of live animals and facilities with biological and chemical residues. Dispose of the carcasses according to provincial regulations and guidelines. Animals with chemical residues need to be handled appropriately. Contact your veterinarian and renderer for more information.