F16 | HANDLING PRACTICES

WHY IS LOW-STRESS PIG HANDLING IMPORTANT?

Calm, low-stress handling = Less fearful pigs
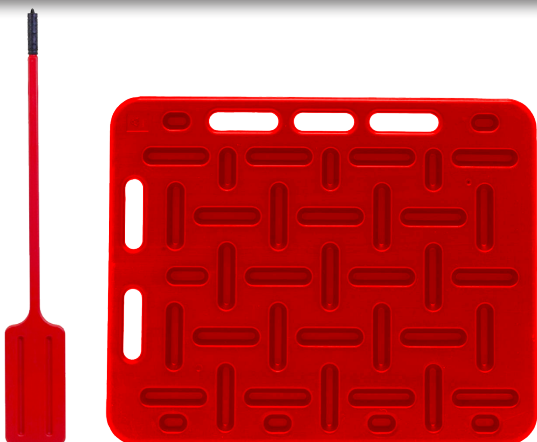
Less fearful pigs are:

· easier to handle and require less time to move
· safer for handlers
· more productive and healthier.

This results in less stress for both pigs and handlers.

TECHNIQUES FOR LOW-STRESS PIG HANDLING

1. **Use appropriate handling tools** to complement your positioning and enhance pig movement.

   (Electric prods should be used only as a last resort and in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs*.)

2. **Use pigs' herd behaviour.** The instinct of pigs is to stay together, follow one another and move as a group.
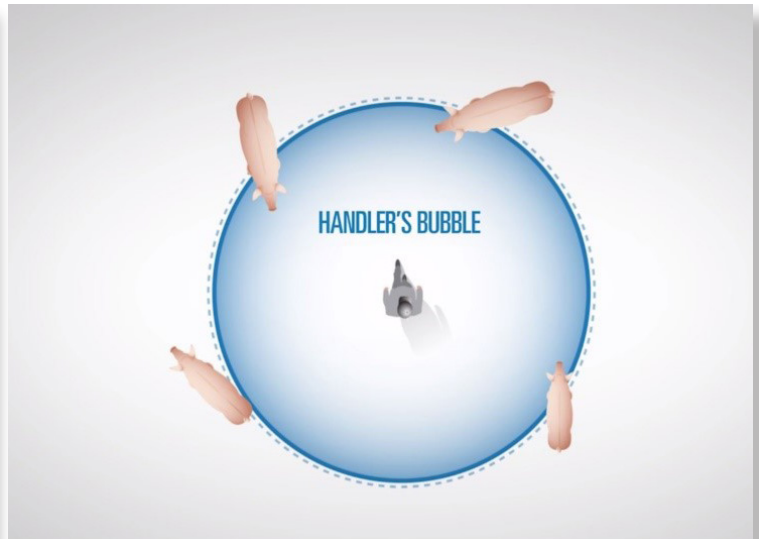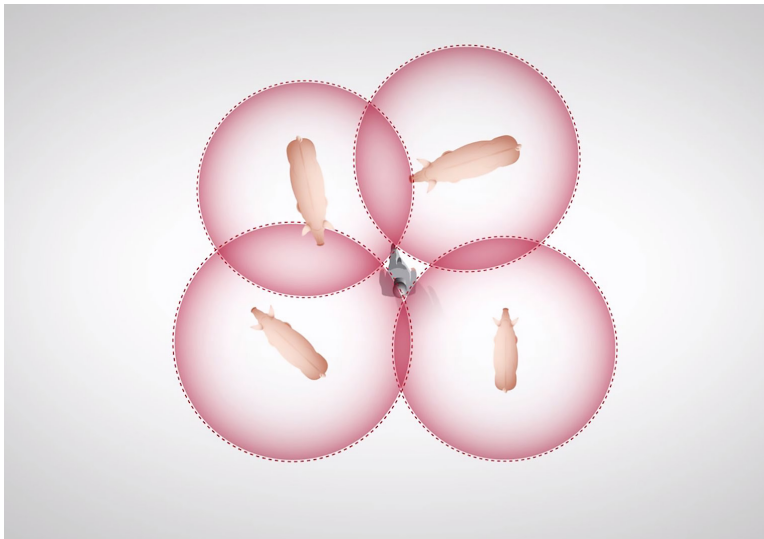
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3. Work at the edge of a pig's "flight zone"

The **flight zone** is the area around a pig that causes a pig to react when a handler enters it.
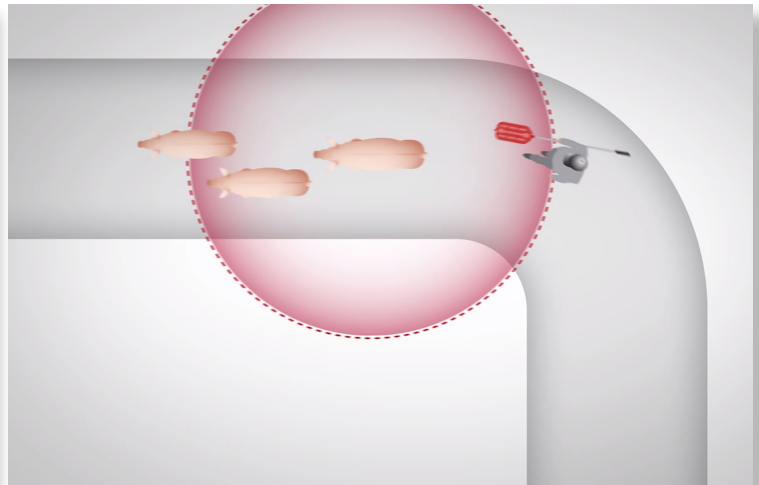
The pigs' collective flight zones form the **handler's bubble**.

4. Recognize the signs of fear:
- raised head and ears
- attention on the handler
- vocalization
- piling and churning
- rapid escape movements

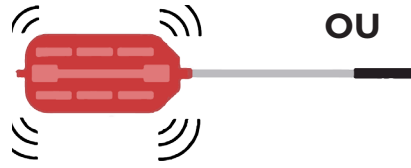**ALWAYS TAKE STEPS TO REDUCE FEAR.**

5. **Calmly apply pressure** to encourage pigs to start moving.

i. Step toward the pigs   ii. Lightly tap pigs

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iii. Make noise for one or two seconds
(e.g., by shaking a paddle)

6. **Release pressure** when pigs are moving well to reduce fear and reward their positive movement. Always release pressure after applying it.

i. Stop moving   ii. Stop making noise   iii. Step away from the pigs

7. Use the **handler's bubble** to encourage calm movement around you. **Herd behaviour** and **release of pressure** will encourage pigs to exit the pen.
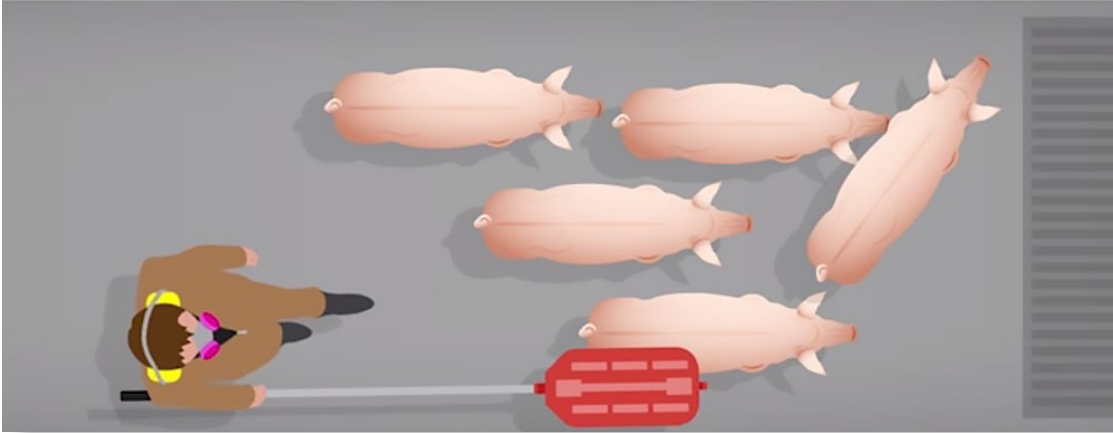
To make handling easier, you can reduce the size of the handler's bubble by:

-   **Staying quiet**

-   **Positioning yourself close to the sides of the pen**

-   **Moving steadily**

-   **Not looking directly at the pigs**

8. **Allow the lead pigs to lead.** Do not distract them when they are already moving.

9. When moving an individual pig, **stay to its side and avoid its blind spot.**

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