

How to Catch Pigs and Hogs

Our topics for this week are:

- **Preparations to catch pigs and hogs**
- **Catching pigs in an indoor, large volume environment compared to small farm outdoor environment**
- **Use of hog snout snares and snubbing ropes**

Preparations for Catching Pigs and Hogs

Restrained swine squeal very loudly. Handlers should always wear moldable ear plugs when working indoors with swine. Squealing is a significant danger to hearing. For example, feeding time in a swine building can have squealing intensity that reaches 95 to 130 decibels. Hearing loss can begin at 85 decibels. If a handler must raise his voice for someone to hear him that is standing an arm's length away, the decibels are above 80 and ear protection should be worn. Cotton balls and ill-fitting plugs are inadequate protection.

When working in hog total confinement buildings, respiratory problems are a risk. Causes of respiratory difficulty in swine buildings can include dust (particularly particles of feed and fecal matter) and gases (especially ammonia from urine and hydrogen sulfide from feces). Wearing a respirator may be necessary. Disposable dust masks with 2 straps provide protection against inhaling larger particles, but do not provide protection against small particles of dust or gases.

Handlers should always leave themselves two exits from a hog pen, always remain within reach of stationary objects to hold to prevent being knocked down, and never back a grown hog into a corner.

In total confinement operations, hogs are restricted to crates in which they are already caught and restrained or small pens in which catching is relatively easy. Regardless of whether hogs are in crates, small pens, large pens, or on pasture, care must be taken not to startle hogs, especially sows with pigs, by being too quiet or excessively noisy. Hogs will become quickly agitated by the presence of a stranger. A startle reaction in hogs is to vocalize with a woof sound, jump to feet if recumbent, and then freeze in place. Normal level noise should be made at a distance so that hogs moderate their alert response before the handler gets near them.

Hogs can be taught to appreciate being rubbed and scratched on the back, but this must be done firmly since light touches will be suspicious of danger. Minor procedures, such as vaccinations, can be done without stress on many hogs by restricting their movement, providing

food, using a soothing voice, and scratching their shoulders and behind their ears during the procedure. The handler should never put his hands within range of a hog being able to turn and bite.

If collecting swine of different sizes, the largest hogs should be sorted out first. Sorting out by largest size to smallest should continue to reduce the risk of smaller pigs being trampled and crushed. Larger hogs or pigs are also more easy to separate from smaller pigs than are smaller pigs from larger pigs or hogs.

Pigs less than 50 lb. can be caught as they run along a wall of a pen by the handler facing the same direction and sweeping an open hand back and under them to grasp the nearest hindleg, picking the pig up, and grasping the other hindleg. For example, a pig running to the left would be caught by its left hind leg by the handler's right hand. Sorting panels or gates can be used as traps to catch pigs.

High Volume Facilities

High volume swine facilities may have collecting pens, crowding pens, alleyways, drop down gates, squeeze chutes, and scales. Pigs will jam up and pile on top of each other if funneled from crowding pens into alleyways. The transition from a crowding pen to an alleyway should have an offset entrance to prevent jamming and piling. Crowding pens for pigs should have a radius of 6 ft. Bud's Box can also be used to funnel swine into an alleyway or into sorting pens. Alleyways and ramps should be 2 pigs wide with a see-through middle partition.

Restraint Crates

Most restraint on confinement hogs is done in their crates or single alleyways. This permits inexperienced handlers to handle and restrain hogs for various reasons relatively safely. Handling and restraint of pigs and hogs raised in hooped pens or on pasture requires more skill.

Hog Snares, Sorting Panels, Snubbing Ropes, and Manual Restraint

Specialized restraint facilities are not needed for routine handling and restraint of swine. Most procedures can be done by minor distractions (scratching the shoulders of a hog, gently holding a pig's thigh), hog snares, panels, snubbing ropes, leg holds, and holding small pigs in the same manner of small dogs.

Holding Piglets

Nursing pigs (piglets) are less than 20 lb. and can be easily picked up and handled like a puppy. They should be removed from the sow's sight and hearing for all procedures to be done, but not for more than one hour.

Leg Holds on Pigs

Leg holds are performed on pigs up to about 50 lb. Handlers should wear ear plugs, coveralls, and high-topped boots.

Inverted standing leg hold (“head stand” hold) is accomplished by grasping each hind leg at the hocks and the pig is picked up by its hind legs with its back toward the handler. The pig’s torso is caught between the handler’s legs. The pig’s chest and shoulders are held by the handler’s legs. This hold is used for castration and subcutaneous injections. High topped boots are needed to protect the handler’s legs from bites that pigs will attempt in this position.

Holding a pig in upright standing position is less common than holding a pig in inverted standing position. Oral medications and subcutaneous injections may be administered while pigs are held upright and standing. Holding the front legs allows the pig to bite the handler’s hands, so gloves are recommended as well as squeezing the sides of the pig’s neck with the handler’s wrists while holding the pig’s front legs. The hold is begun by straddling the pig and grasping the front legs. Small pigs may be caught by a hindleg and then moving the grasps to a hand holding both front legs. The flanks are immobilized with the handler’s legs.

Hog Snout Snare

Swine more than 50 lb. are usually captured with a snare (a hollow rigid tube with a wire that goes through the tube and forms a capture loop at the end). Large hogs should be positioned so that their attempt to back up while being snared is blocked since they may be too strong to hold still after the snare is applied. The loop is placed inside the hog’s mouth and the loop is closed tightly around the upper jaw of the snout (the maxilla). Care should be taken to get the snare loop far enough back in the mouth that when it is tightened it does not squeeze the soft tissue of the end of the nose where it would cause pain, shut the nostrils, and probably slip off.

After tightening the snare, the handler moves in front of the hog as the hog will lean back and try to pull out of the loop. Snares will lose their effectiveness with time. Their use should be for less than 10 minutes. The use of snares with hogs that have tusks can be dangerous when trying to remove the snare in part because the snare must be placed behind the tusks and can be hard to remove. Swine should never be pulled forward with a hog snare.

Snubbing Rope

Restraint of large hogs that are too strong for a handler to restrain with a snare pole may be achieved with a lariat and quick release honda if an assistant handler is available. Long-handled (3 foot) bull nose tongs can be used by the assistant to squeeze the neck behind the ears, which will briefly restrain the hog and make them open their mouth. The handler stands to the side behind the hog’s head and places the bottom of the lariat’s loop in its mouth, around the upper jaw and pulls the loop down tight on its upper jaw. The tongs can then be removed and the rope is run around a tie ring or similar tie point higher than the hogs head, and the hog is pulled near to the snubbing post. If tying the snubbing rope, the tie should be close (within a foot) of the

snubbing post to reduce the risk of the hog being able to loosen the snare and spit it out. If an assistant plans to continue to hold the other end rather than tie it, it is helpful to tie the end to a short rod or pole to maintain a sturdy grip as the hog pulls backward.

Use of a snubbing rope with a quick release honda permits easier and safer removal than a snare in a large hog with tusks, but it does not allow any pushing away option if the hog becomes aggressive and moves forward rather than pulling back. Two snubbing ropes that are cross-tied will reduce the risk of the handler being chased. Quick release hondas should have a leather tether that will allow safer and quicker release of the latch.

A hog should never be pulled forward with a snubbing rope. However, the hog may be allowed to move backward with a handler holding the rope while a second handler guides it by grasping its tail.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Proper ear and leg protection should be worn when catching pigs and hogs.**
- 2. High volume, indoor hog production is designed primarily to reduce human labor so most manual catching of hogs is unnecessary.**
- 3. With the use of hog panels, catch pens, manual restraint of pigs by their legs, snout snares, and snubbing ropes, small farm operations can catch and restraint hogs to provide a less overall stressful environment for swine than a crowded life on concrete floors devoid of fresh air and sunshine.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 325 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.

