

Moving Pigs and Hogs

Our topics for this week are:

- Training pigs for moving
- Use of canes, poles, panels, rope harnesses, cans, and lifting and carrying to move pigs and hogs

Training Pigs for Moving

In total indoor confinement operations, piglets are not allowed to learn to follow their mother. At weaning, they are separated from older swine. Handlers should begin to train them for being herded just after weaning. Training should involve being rubbed and scratched for short periods after being fed. Small reward treats should be offered. Later training periods should include being gently pushed in different directions and being briefly picked up and gently put down. Eventually, moving them in groups of 5 or 6 in a small pen (10 X 10 ft) and up ramps without generating any excitement should be practiced. Trained hogs should be able to be moved by the handler walking next to the hog, just behind its shoulder, and guiding it with a cane by taps on the shoulders and neck.

Swine should only be moved in early morning or late afternoon to reduce the risk of overheating. Hogs move best if moved in small groups. Groups of 3 to 6 are recommended. Large groups tend to scatter or pile on top of each other, if cornered. They are not as capricious as goats but much more independent and willing to try an individual escape than are sheep and cattle. Alleyways for moving hogs should be 18-20 inches wide.

Distractions to Eliminate

Like cattle, hogs are reluctant to walk on strange flooring, move toward darkness, or past a dangling or wiggly object on fences. They should be moved toward better lit areas (but not blinding light), over familiar flooring without sharp contrasts in color or texture (cover with bedding if needed), and use solid panels in alleyways without clutter for herding. Side-by-side alleyways with a see-through separation panel in the middle allows 2 pigs to move abreast and facilitates forward movement.

Canes, Poles, and Paddles

Canes and poles can be useful in moving hogs, if they are trained for them. Gently tapping the sides of the face, neck and shoulders with a cane or paddle can redirect a hog. If canes, poles or paddles are used abusively, the hog may become frantic or aggressive. Rattle paddles can be more effective for hogs that are not trained to tolerate canes and poles.

Sorting Panels

Sorting panels (also called "hurdles") are flat panels of wood, plastic, or metal that are helpful in sorting, loading, and restraining pigs and hogs. They should be at least as tall as the hog and at least 2/3 as long. Panels may have small holes along the top edge or one side for the handler's hands, but they should not have holes that allow the hog to see through or the hog will not

change direction, it will try to push through or under the panel. The smoothest side of the panel should be presented to the hog. The top should be tilted toward the handler and the bottom pressed on the floor to prevent hog from rooting under the bottom.

Backing Bucket

If a hog's head is covered with a bucket, it will move backward quickly. The speed and direction of retreat can be guided by a second handler holding its tail to move a hog short distances. If they are in an alleyway and cannot turn, a scoop shovel in front of their face may aid in backing them toward a desired destination.

Rope Harness

A rope harness for a pig can be created by putting a non-constricting loop tied with a bowline knot over its neck and a half-hitch around the thorax. The harness can be effective for controlling the movement of pigs up to about 100 lb.

Plastic Trash Can on Wheels

Weanling pigs and small pigs can be moved short-distances in a plastic trash can on wheels or a wheelbarrow with high sides.

Carrying or Lifting Pigs

Small pigs (less than 10 lb.) can be scooped up with a hand under the body or caught by a hindleg and then grasped around the trunk of their body for their comfort and a feeling of security. They should never be grabbed by their ears.

Larger pigs (10-50 lb.) can be caught by a hindleg, held by both hind legs above the hocks, swung between the handler's legs. The pig is pinned with the handler's knees behind their shoulders while continuing to hold the hind legs. Hogs will attempt to raise their head and push away from the handler with their front legs. High-topped boots are advisable because some hogs will bite the handler's legs with this technique. For some procedures pigs are caught by a front leg and restrained by holding both front legs with their body pinned between the handler's legs. This method is best performed with thick leather gloves to protect the hands from the possibility of being bitten during the restraint.

Hogs more than 50 lb. should be lifted by 2 people, each holding one hind leg.

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

- 1. Pigs and hogs are best moved in groups of 3 to 6.**
- 2. Distractions to eliminate that will encourage swine to move are nearly identical to those for cattle.**
- 3. High-topped boots should be worn when moving 10 to 50 lb pigs.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

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.