

Catching and Routine Handling of Pigs and Hogs

Our topics for this week are:

- Catching pigs and hogs
- Handling equipment and facilities for swine

APPROACHING AND CATCHING

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 their 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.

Special precautions should be taken to prevent being bitten on the legs and knocked down in a hog pen. When entering a pen of hogs, a handler should wear knee high boots and stay near a fence or something else that is firmly stationary to grab to maintain his balance if pushed on. A handler may carry a panel or pole to keep curious hogs from crowding him. Hogs in total confinement are deprived of normal mental stimulation and become excited by the presence of a handler with whom they also associate with being fed. Smelling a handler's legs and inquisitive bites of boots is common. However, this can become dangerous if the hogs are large, have not been fed recently, or blood is present anywhere in the pen. Hogs are omnivores and will become very excited if blood is present.

Swine on pasture or in hog lots are usually taught to come for feeding by being called. Traditionally, the commands "suey" and "pig-pig-pig" have been used to call hogs.

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.

HANDLING FOR ROUTINE CARE AND MANAGEMENT

Basic Equipment and Facilities

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 using 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

Within 1 day to 2 weeks of age, piglets have their needle teeth clipped, ears are notched, iron dextran injections are given, and males are castrated. In close confinement operations, the tails may be docked. Vaccinations may also be started before weaning. 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 hands 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 pig 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.

Snout Rings

Hogs confined in dirt lots or pastures will root the ground with their snouts. If rooting is excessive, when the pigs are about 40 lb., they are caught with a snout snare and metal snout rings are clamped into the edge of the cartilage of the nose. Pigs less than 50 lb. can be caught by an assistant and held by their front legs. Leather gloves should be worn and the pig's front legs should be pulled back along the edge of the pig's face to block its ability to bite. Boars are not ringed since they use their nose to push on the female during breeding. If excessive rings are used or placed in poor positions, they can interfere with the pig opening lids of self-feeders.

So-called "humane" snout rings are clamped into the nasal septum, leaving the rim of the

snout free to open feeder lids without restriction.

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

- 1. When handling hogs, a handler must take precautions not to be knocked down or bitten on the legs.**
- 2. Pigs are routinely restrained by a holding similar to holding a dog or by its front or hind legs.**
- 3. Other than restraint with crates and chutes, hogs are routinely restrained with snout snares or snubbing ropes.**

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.