

# **PRACTICAL TIPS AND GUIDELINES FOR THE HANDLING AND TRANSPORT OF MARKET HOGS**

**Temple Grandin, Colorado State University  
Tina Widowski, University of Guelph  
Penny Lawlis, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Animal handling and welfare is becoming an increasingly important issue to consumers and major meat buyers. Good handling and humane treatment of pigs during transport and slaughter ensures a product that is acceptable to consumers, not only in terms of quality meat that is free of defects, but also in the assurance that the animals that provide the meat are well cared for. In the big picture, humane handling doesn't only involve the hogs that are shipped to the plant but also includes the treatment of those animals that are compromised and unfit for transport. The objectives of this session are to review some practical tips and guidelines that producers can use to ensure good handling of market hogs and compromised animals. This includes practical tips and troubleshooting for the care, moving and loading of finishing pigs, an overview of the Recommended Codes of Practice for Transportation and guidelines for decision-making about transporting compromised pigs

## **HANDLING PIGS FOR OPTIMUM PERFORMANCE ON THE FARM AND IN THE SLAUGHTER PLANT**

(excerpt from <http://www.grandin.com/references/handle.pigs.performance.html>, Grandin, 1999)

### **Tips for Moving and Loading Finishing Pigs on the Farm**

1. When loading finishing pigs, move very small groups of 5 to 6 at a time.
2. Do not store large groups of finishing pigs in an alley or holding pen. This will lead to damage caused by fighting. It is best to take each small group of pigs immediately from the finishing pen to the truck.
3. New finishing buildings should have a 3-foot (1 m) wide alley. This is wide enough to allow 2 pigs to walk down it side by side. If a building has a 2-foot (.75 m) alley, only three pigs should be moved at a time.
4. Do not overload the trucks. Overloaded trucks, especially during hot weather, are a major cause of high death losses.
5. Do not allow pigs to stand in a fully loaded truck, get moving immediately. Heat builds up rapidly in a stationery vehicle.

6. In winter, use straw for bedding. In extremely cold weather, straw provides the best insulation and helps prevent frostbite. Observations in packing plants indicate that trucks with inadequate bedding are more likely to contain frost bitten pigs.
7. When there is high heat and humidity, it is best to transport pigs very early in the morning and at night. Stocking density should be reduced.
8. Schedule trucks so that pigs can be unloaded promptly at the packing plant.
9. Minimize the use of electric prods. Electric prods should not be used in the finishing barn.
10. Calm pigs are easier to sort and separate than excited pigs. Pigs are easier to sort if the handler moves slowly and deliberately and separates the desired pigs from the group on the first attempt. Excited pigs stick together and are more difficult to separate.
11. If pigs refuse to leave the finishing building, try shutting off the ventilation or reversing it. Pigs often balk if air is blowing in their faces as they exit the building.
12. To make pigs flow more easily out the door of a finishing building, attach plywood to the last 16 feet (5 m) of pen near the door. This will prevent pigs which are being driven out of the building from seeing or touching pigs which are in pens near the door. After loading, the plywood should be removed because it will interfere with ventilation flow through the pens.

### **At the Packing Plant**

Practical experience has shown that improving handling at the packing plant and reducing electric prod usage will improve meat quality. Below are some tips for improving handling in packing plants which will help maintain pork quality and reduce PSE.

1. Rest pigs prior to moving to the stunning chute for 2 to 4 hours. Slaughtering pigs immediately after unloading will have a detrimental effect on pork quality.
2. Use sprinklers during hot weather.
3. Staging areas which lead to the stunning chute crowd pen should be filled only half full. Fill the crowd pen only half full and DO NOT push the crowd gate tight up against the pigs. They need room to turn.
4. If pigs balk and refuse to go up the single file chute or constantly back out of the chutes, look for distractions that cause balking. Some of the things that cause balking are: air blowing in the faces of approaching pigs, shiny reflections on metal, puddles, a chain hanging in the chute, restrainer entrance too dark, seeing people up ahead and moving objects. Removing distractions and improving lighting will reduce balking. Light up the

restrainer and chute entrances with lamps. Animals will not go into a dark place. The lamps must not shine directly into the faces of approaching pigs.

5. Electric prods should be eliminated in the yards and staging area. Pigs moved with electric prods have higher heart rates than pigs moved with a panel. In the stunning chute an electric prod may be needed on an occasional stubborn pig. Some other tool should be in the person's hand as the primary tool for moving the animals. The electric prod should only be picked up when it is needed. To reduce use it should not be constantly in the person's hands. In a survey that Grandin author conducted for the USDA, it was possible to greatly reduce electric prod usage. In two plants which had excessive use of electric prods 44% of the pigs were electrically prodded. After handlers were instructed to fill the crowd pen only half full and tap the pigs first, the percentage of pigs which were electrically prodded dropped to 15%. Handlers were able to keep up with the line when electric prod usage was reduced. It is important to eliminate distractions which cause balking. At another plant, it was impossible to reduce electric prodding when the sun was out due to harsh shadows. When a cloud covered the sun the pigs moved easily. To solve this problem, the roof over the crowd pen had to be extended to block high contrasts of light and dark at the stunning chute entrance. In plants where pigs are stunned in groups on the floor, electric prods should be totally eliminated.
6. Monitoring of squealing levels is a simple way to monitor stress levels during handling. When pigs are quiet stress levels will be lower. Vocalization (squealing) is highly correlated with physiological stress levels and poor pork quality. In a slaughter plant an easy way to measure squealing is to count the number of stun cycles where the entire handling area is quiet. As each pig is stunned; score on a yes/no basis - "room quiet" or "heard a squeal". From this you can calculate the percentage of time the room is quiet.

## **RECOMMENDED CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE CARE AND HANDLING OF FARM ANIMALS: TRANSPORTATION**

In 2001, the Canadian Agri-food Research Council published the Transportation Codes of Practice. The voluntary code is "intended for use as a guide and educational tool in promoting sound animal transportation and welfare practices". The guide contains practical information that transporters and producers can use to assess and improve facilities and practices with regard to animal transportation. The code covers general considerations for all transported livestock as well as specific recommendations for different species and classes.

Specific recommendations for the handling and transport of pigs included in the code:

- step heights and ramp slopes for loading and unloading facilities
- minimum space allowances for different sizes of pigs in transit
- recommendations for handling, loading and unloading
- care and protection during hot weather transit
- care and protection during cold weather transit
- special considerations for boars

- special considerations for iso-weaned pigs

The Code is available from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Animal Health and Production Division, and on the internet at [www.carc-crac.ca](http://www.carc-crac.ca).

## **GUIDELINES FOR TRANSPORTING COMPROMISED PIGS**

The Ontario Humane Transportation Working Group [Members: Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) and Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA)] has developed practical guidelines that producers can use to determine when an animal is not fit for transport and what actions to take if that happens.

- The Guidelines include the signs and health conditions of animals that are at risk during transport, including pigs that can be transported with special provisions.
- The Guidelines help to identify non-ambulatory pigs that should not be transported.
- Regulation 732/94 of the Livestock and Livestock Products Act provides special care for non-ambulatory animals. A non-ambulatory animal is defined as "any animal that due to age, injury, metabolic or systemic disease, etc., is unable to raise itself without assistance to a standing and walking state" (source: Ontario Veterinary Medical Association). "Downer" and "downed animal" are terms used in reference to a non-ambulatory animal. **All non-ambulatory animals require a veterinary certificate.**
- The Guidelines help to determine when to call a veterinarian.
- The Guidelines help to determine when to euthanize.

The Guidelines are available in a pamphlet that can be obtained from OFAC, OMAFRA or Ontario Pork.

Further information on proper handling of non-ambulatory livestock can also found be in OFAC's "Preventing and Handling Non-Ambulatory Livestock on the Farm" brochure at <http://www.ofac.org/ambulat.html>.