

# Standard Operating Procedure for Animal Handling of Nursery and Finishing Pigs

---

## Introduction

---

Nurseries and finishers must have protocols for receiving new pigs to the site, moving pigs within the facility (such as to a treatment pen) and for loading out animals. All pigs should be handled appropriately for their age. Pigs should be moved at their normal walking pace and aggressive handling must be avoided as it can lead to stressed pigs or injured pigs and/or handlers. Handling pigs of all sizes requires attention to the farm's biosecurity protocols at all times.

## Safety

---

### Hazards:

- **For all size of pigs:**

- Lifting
- Struck by or against object
- Animal bite
- Fall (slips and trips)
- Pinch points
- Debris in eyes
- Dust (respiratory)
- Noise (hearing)

- **For pigs over 40 pounds:**

- Stepped on by animal
- Struck by animal
- Animal contact injury
- Caught between gates

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

---

Personal protective equipment (PPE) to be used may include:

- Protective eyewear
- Dust mask
- Safety-toe boots
- Hearing protection
- Exam gloves

## Supplies

---

Supplies needed for animal handling may include:

- Shaker
- Sorting panel
- Chalk/ paint
- Electric prod
- Cart
- Gates
- Wood chips or other traction-enhancer
- Spot light/flashlight
- Water hose

## Procedures - Preparing for Animal Handling Activities

---

### **Preparing for animal handling activities:**

Before moving nursery or finishing pigs into pens, check that the pens are set-up properly, and are appropriate size for the animal/stage of production. Ensure water and feed is available per the farm's protocol. Ensure that temperature and ventilation settings are properly adjusted prior to moving any animal into the room. When loading out animals, ensure the load out area is properly set-up, the trailer is aligned well with the load-out area, the chute is in good repair and trailer properly boarded/bedded for the weather conditions.

Perform the following additional steps before beginning animal handling activities:

- Clear all objects from alleys and hallways.
- Inspect alleys and hallways for distractions such as changes in light, drafts, or shadows. Remove any distractions if possible.
- Gather all handling equipment
- Inspect handling equipment for safety concerns for pigs and caretakers

## Procedures - General Nursery or Finisher Pig Handling

---

### **General nursery or finisher pig handling:**

- The primary tool of animal movement needs to be pigs' natural behavior and movement patterns.
- When sorting and moving pigs, work in pairs and have one person work the pen gate while the other brings pigs to the gate for sorting.
- When emptying entire pens, work along the side of the pen. Work on the inside of the arc the handlers want follow and use the handler's bubble to narrow the flow of the pigs.
- Handlers should rely on a sorting board instead of their bodies to turn or stop large pigs.
- When working with larger pigs, handlers must move through the pen with their knees slightly bent to prevent knee and leg strains.

## Procedures - Handling Nursery Pigs

---

### **Handling nursery pigs:**

Pigs should be moved at their normal walking pace. Aggressive handling must be avoided as it can lead to stressed pigs or injured pigs and caretakers. Pigs can be moved in either groups or by picking them up and carrying them. Pigs may be picked up and placed in a cart for movement. When moving pigs by hand, they should be picked up by holding under the rib cage, over the back, or by grabbing a rear leg, above the hock, and then gently setting piglets into a cart, alleyway, or pen. Before releasing a pig to the ground, the pig should have two points of contact (i.e. both front legs) with the surface before the handler lets go. When moving pigs in groups, the group should be large enough to be efficient for the facility, but small enough to be safe for the pigs and handlers. Depending on facility design, temperament, and safety concerns, move weaned or nursery pigs in groups of 20 pigs at a time.

Electric prods must not be used to move nursery pigs out of pens.

## **Procedures - Loading and Unloading Nursery Pigs**

---

### **Loading and unloading nursery pigs:**

- Make sure your trailer is aligned with the ramp so there are no gaps. Weaned pigs can get their legs trapped between the trailer and the ramp. Pig legs can be broken if they get a leg stuck and the pigs behind them keep coming.
- Use extra care and allow extra time for these pigs to move up, or down, the ramp and chute.
- Avoid excessive noises such as yelling or banging on the truck or wall to rush and crowd pigs into or out of the truck and into the chute during movement.

## **Procedures - Handling Finisher Pigs**

---

### **Handling finisher pigs:**

Groups of finished pigs should be small enough so that the handler can apply handling interventions to the pigs not moving. Depending on facility design, temperament, and safety concerns, move finisher/market pigs in groups of 3-5 pigs at a time.

## **Procedures - Electric Prod Use**

---

### **Electric prod use:**

Electric prods should not be used as the primary tool of animal movement. If electric prods are used, correct use includes:

- Applied to the back of the pig behind the shoulder
- Duration of the shock should not exceed 1 second
- Pigs are allowed 5 seconds to respond before another shock is given
- Not used more than twice on animals that refuse to move

Prods must not be used on non-ambulatory pigs.

## **Procedures - Preparing for Market Hog Load-out**

---

### **Preparations for market hog load-out:**

Prior to load out, determine the quantity and location of the pigs to be loaded. Identify, and mark or sort out the pigs to be loaded prior to loading time.

- Follow farm biosecurity procedures for load-out personnel.
- Clear alleys of all debris.
- Inspect the condition of latches, gates and dividers.
- Set up and secure solid panels on alley gating along the last section of alley near the door that the pigs will load out through.
- Set up loading chute:
  - Adjust chute height to truck entry level.
  - Check that chute cleats are securely fastened in place and spaced correctly.
  - Per site conditions, the use of wood chips or other traction-enhancer materials in the chute may be needed.
  - Per loading conditions, provide adequate lighting for day and night load out.
- Adjust barn ventilation system to stabilize air flow during load out.
  - Reduce or eliminate drafts blowing towards pigs as they load.
  - Ensure adequate air flow to help maintain or reduce barn humidity.
  - Temporarily turn off alarm system.
- Bring sort panels/boards and all load-out equipment into the barn.
- Help direct the truck as it backs up to the chute, always staying in clear view of the driver and never walking or standing between trailer and chute.
- Make sure trailer is properly aligned with the barn exit.
- Inspect the truck to ensure it is clean, that an appropriate number of ventilation slots are plugged (based on weather), and the proper type and amount of bedding material is in place.
- Position load-out personnel in barn, including sorters, movers, loader/counters.

## Procedures - Market Hog Load-out

---

### Market hog load-out:

- Watch for signs of fatigue, including open-mouthed breathing, inability to move and splotchy skin
- Separate pigs that become stressed or non-ambulatory during load-out, and allow them to rest before being loaded onto the trailer.
- Do not load any ill, injured, or fatigued pigs onto a truck. Where the likelihood of recovery is low, even with treatment, the pig should be humanely euthanized.
- Sort marked pigs out of pens (using sort panels) from the back-end of the barn. Work toward the doorway at the opposite end where the truck/trailer is backed up to the load-out door.
- Move pigs in groups of five or fewer through the alley and into the chute.
- Fill the bottom and then the top decks of the trailer, placing the proper number of pigs per compartment based upon their average weight, the outside temperature and trailer compartment size. (Depending upon trailer design, the top deck may be loaded first, or vice-versa.)
- Never load a trailer top heavy.
- Repeat loading steps until all pigs are loaded out on the site.
- Accurately complete the animal movement paperwork. Record farm name, premises identification number, building/lot number, number of pigs loaded and then sign your name.
- Lower the chute to ground/storage/transport level.
- Remove all loading equipment. Clean and disinfect equipment and store it in proper storage location.
- Return ventilation settings to the original, pre-loading settings/levels.
- Turn the alarm system on.
- Do not transport any pig that is unable to walk, is ill or significantly injured.

## Procedures - Fitness for Transport

---

### Fitness for transport:

**Any pig unable to walk, is ill or significantly injured, should not be transported to market channels. Where the likelihood of recovery is low, even with treatment, the pig should be humanely euthanized. Any pig that becomes fatigued should be moved to a resting area in an appropriate manner. A fatigued pig is defined as having temporarily lost the ability to walk but has a reasonable expectation to recover full locomotion with rest. A resting area helps enable recovery by minimizing competition for feed and water and provides the opportunity for monitoring.**

All pigs that are scheduled for transport should be evaluated by a handler for fitness to travel. If a pig is found to be unfit, it should not be loaded. Instead it should be segregated for treatment or humane euthanasia.

The following list provides some examples of animals that are unfit to be transported, including, but not limited to:

- Those that are sick, injured, weak, disabled or fatigued
- Those that are unable to stand unaided and bear weight on each leg
- Those that are blind in both eyes
- Those that cannot be moved without causing them additional suffering
- Newborns with an unhealed navel
- Pregnant animals that would be in the final 10 percent of the gestational period at the planned time of unloading (They may be transported if special conditions are provided and additional attention is given during transport)
- Females traveling without young who have given birth within the past 48 hours
- Those whose body condition would result in poor welfare because of the expected climatic conditions

## Resources Referenced

---

Feed and Water (SOP)

Safe Pig Handling Training

PQA/TQA Handling Chapters