

Technical note

Pig behaviour and handling for killing on farm

Introduction

Pig handling involves the interaction between three key elements.



1. *The animals*: each individual animal will cope (and therefore react) differently with the environment and people
2. *The facilities*: the way the “hardware and equipment” is planned
3. *The handlers*: how they behave and interact with the pigs.

Pigs have basic instincts and learnt behaviours, which all focus around their natural behaviours and needs. Pigs can appear stubborn if you don't understand their behaviour. Pigs will vary in behaviour and negative past experiences may make pigs fearful and make it more difficult to handle pigs. They are very social animals so don't like to move alone and have poor depth vision, so don't like to move up or down steep slopes. They have wide peripheral vision, so are easily scared and panic. And like most animals, pigs have a blind spot behind them.

Farm facilities won't be perfect but try and remove any distractions (bags, pieces of wood, rubbish, banging chains, water puddles or changes in flooring, bright glaring lights etc) before moving or handling pigs. Aim to use small race ways and pens, with solid walls and consistent flooring, curved races, where possible. Avoid loud noises and too many people, when handling pigs.

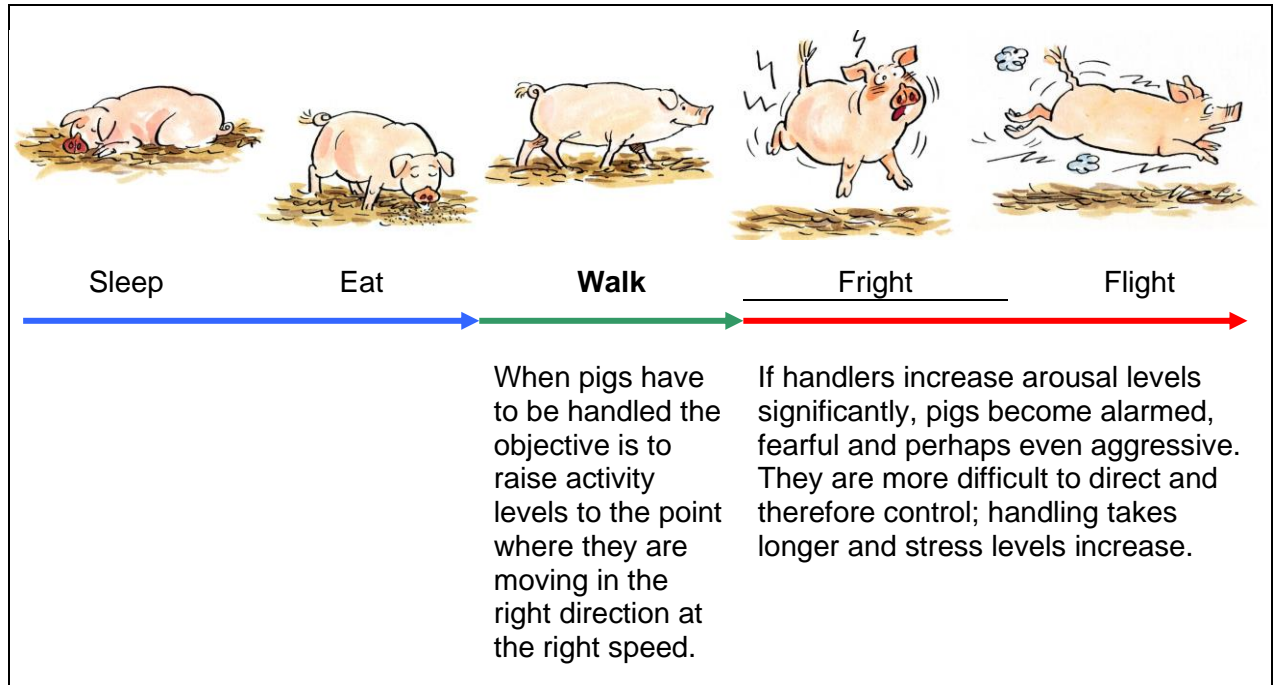
Handling pigs that are calm and quiet is the goal - not a situation with pigs that bark, squeal, scream, panic or run. The level of stress on the animals (and the handlers) is minimised when all three of these elements are in harmony.

This note aims to look in more detail at the role of the handler.

Good pig handling that keeps stress levels low relies upon people having a good basic knowledge of the animals they handle, but more importantly an understanding of how their own behaviour can influence the effectiveness of the handling process.

Animals and Activity Levels

In the farm environment an animal's activity or arousal level ranges from sleep at one end, to fight or flight or freeze reactions at the other.



The Flight Zone

All animals (and people) have an imaginary area around them; their “personal space” or flight zone. When a threat, such as a handler attempts to get close and moves into the animal's flight zone it instinctively moves away, if it can, to maintain a safe distance from the threat.

The size of the flight zone depends on the species, breed and past experiences of the animal. Pigs are better equipped to fight off a predator and generally have a smaller flight zone than grazing (prey) species such as sheep or even cattle. More docile breeds, and pigs that have had positive handling experiences on farm, will also tend to have a smaller flight zone.

Understanding the flight zone is important to influence, direct and control pig movement. To control the movement of a group or single pig:

- Stand on the edge of the flight zone behind and to one side
- Step just inside the flight zone boundary (position A) to make the animal move forward
- As the animal moves forward, move forward with it, staying just inside the flight zone
- The direction of movement can be controlled by moving from one side of the pig to the other to keep it moving forward and straight
- Move outside the flight zone and stop, and the animal will stop moving.

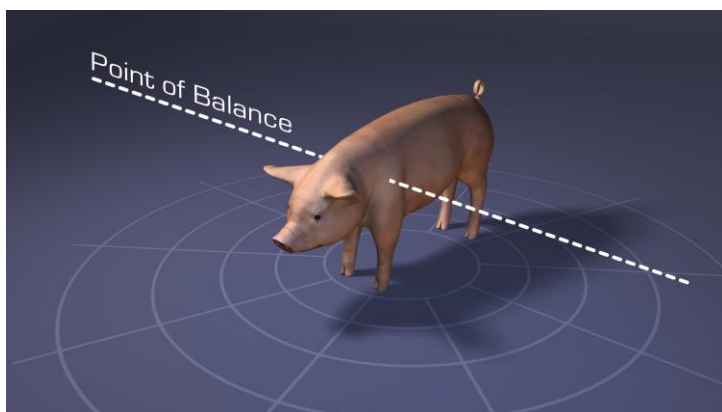


If the handler moves too deep into the animal's flight zone, the pig's reaction will be to run away if it can escape from the handler or if it has nowhere to go it will turn and attempt to run back past the handler.

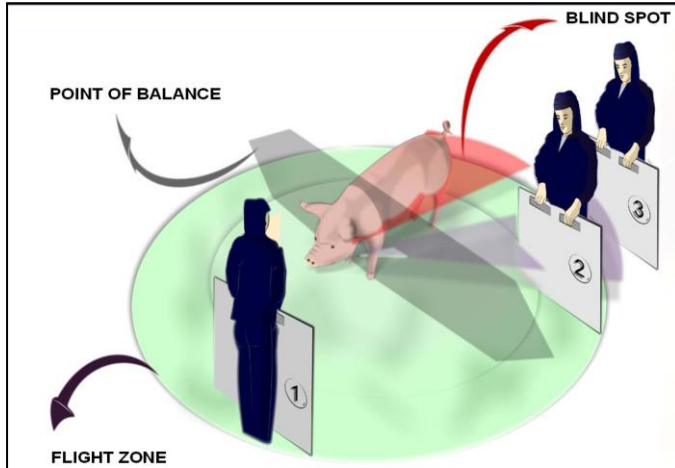
Handlers can increase or decrease the size of the flight zone, and to some extent the response of the animal, by their approach. Being quiet and calm reduces the size of the flight zone; increasing levels of noise or activity from the handler will increase the size of the flight zone.

Point of Balance

A line drawn through the animal's shoulder is "the point of balance".



The point of balance can be used by the handler to control and direct movement. An animal moves forward if the handler is behind the point of balance. An animal will move backwards if the handler is in front of the point of balance. Please see the pig handling diagram below.



Handling Aids

Handling aids, correctly used, are there to encourage pigs to move away calmly from the handler in the desired direction. They can be classed according to the behavioural principle in which they are designed to work.

- a) **Voice, clapping, rattles and flappers** are all handling aids which rely mainly on noise to stimulate pig movement, but there may be an additional startle response from the way the object moves. It can be hard to direct the noise appropriately, especially in otherwise noisy environments.



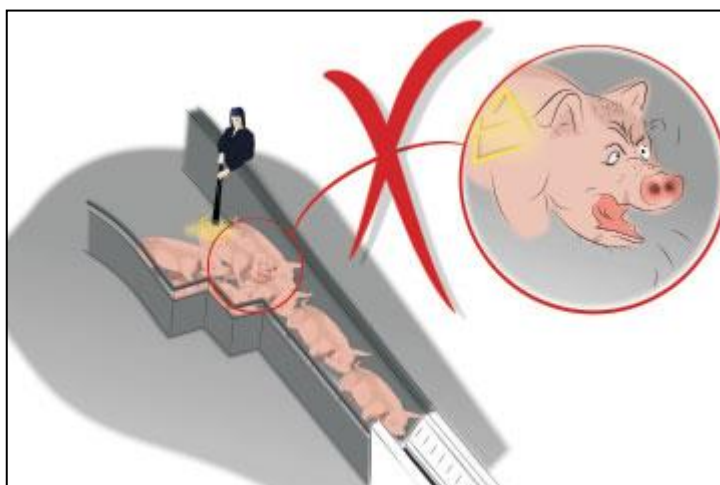
- b) **Boards or bats** rely on blocking out sight either side or behind the pig to keep them moving forward and block their escape if they attempt to go in the wrong direction



- c) **Hand pressure** stimulates movement through contact with the animal. The level of force used and on what part of the body contact is made needs to be appropriate and controlled. Sharp or hard objects must **never** be used.



Electric goads deliver electric current to the animals, causing them distress and pain, and therefore is legally controlled or banned in many countries. ***The World Animal Protection does not recommend the use of electric goads as an aid of animal handling and moving.*** Appropriate training can enable handlers to move pigs effectively and efficiently. If pigs always stop moving at one particular location repeatedly, it is highly recommended to investigate whether some physical or other impediment is preventing animals from moving.



The use of handling aids must be controlled to ensure the minimum stress on the animals. Certain groups of pigs may require more persuasion than others. The important principle is that the level of persuasion is increased only when the pigs have not responded and have space to respond, rather than a continued routine use of instruments on pigs that are already moving in the desired direction. Likewise the inappropriate use of any method on any sensitive parts of the animal, using unnecessary force, or in a way that causes pain, injury or suffering, must not be tolerated.

Animals must **never** be kicked, punched, slashed and **never** dragged, dropped or hoisted when conscious. **Burning, burial or drowning of live animals must never occur.**