



Handling Equipment

General Protocol

- Good handling practices will be prioritized on the farm. It is understood that using low-stress handling practices contributes to the well-being and positive impact of the animal, caretaker, and the pork industry. Willful acts of abuse will not be tolerated on this farm.
- Handling equipment is available to assist in sorting and moving pigs in a safe, humane, and efficient manner.
- Approved handling equipment for pigs includes sorting boards, a rattle paddle, nylon flags, a matador's cape, and a plastic ribbon on a stick.
- An electric prod can be used only as a last resort, typically during loading out pigs.

Procedures for Handling Different Ages of Animals

Handling breeding stock (sows, gilts, and boars)

- Breeding stock are the largest animals to move and can be unpredictable. Caretakers should use caution when handling these animals.
- The caretaker should use a sorting board when handling these animals.
- Breeding animals move best when the handler is calm and quiet and using herding (group) behavior.

Nursery and finisher pigs

- The caretaker should use a sorting board when handling these animals.
- The movement of pigs at this size is typically quick. These animals do best when moved in a group where visual contact can be made between animals.
- Nursery and finisher size animals move best when the handlers are calm and quiet, and work in pairs. Many times the pigs will move around the handler, creating a bubble that can be used to move them in the right direction.
- Once pigs are moving in the correct direction, giving them space and staying calm will help facilitate movement.

Piglets

- Piglets can be moved through herding in a group or transporting them by hand or in a cart.
 - » When picking up pigs:
 - Stabilize by holding them under the rib cage.
 - Grab by two rear legs, above the hock area, or catch with one rear leg and stabilize the body before lifting off the ground.
- Before releasing a pig to the ground and letting go, ensure it has a point of contact such as a front leg.





Procedure for Equipment

- Use all equipment calmly and in respect to the pig's point of balance, blind spots, and flight zones.
- Use equipment to move or handle animals only to guide the movement of the animals, not to cause harm.
- Reducing fear and stress levels in pigs reduces the incidence of slipping and injury.
 - » Slow, calm movements and low voices are ways to reduce pig stress.
 - » Pigs try to keep track of all handlers. Only one handler should pressure pigs at any one time.
 - » Keep pigs calm; if pigs start to become excited as seen with ears erect and bunching, release pressure.
- To use handling tools correctly, the handler must be in the correct position.

Sorting board

- Most commonly used equipment for moving pigs safely (See Figure 1.)
- Bi-fold or tri-fold panels useful for corralling pigs and moving them as a calm group
- Creates a physical barrier between the animal and caretaker
- Useful when moving larger animals and stopping movement of the animal
- If the sorting board becomes split at the corners, replace as soon as possible so that it does not cause injury to the animal or caretaker.



Figure 1. Sorting board.

Rattle paddle

- Can provide auditory, physical, and visual stimuli (See Figure 2.)
- Used to create a sound to aid in the movement of the animal
- Can be used to gently tap pigs from the behind to move them away from the caretaker
- Should never be used to touch the pig in front of the shoulder
- Generally used to move weaned pigs from the farrowing room to the nursery
- Often used to extend the arm reach of the caretaker and can be used to add pressure. Once pigs are moving, the applied pressure should be released.



Figure 2. Rattle paddle.

Nylon flags, matador's cape, and plastic ribbon on a stick

- Less commonly used on production facilities but effective as a visual and physical stimulus to move pigs
- Nylon flags and a matador's cape (see Figure 3) can also be used to block a pig's vision and provide a dead-end effect.

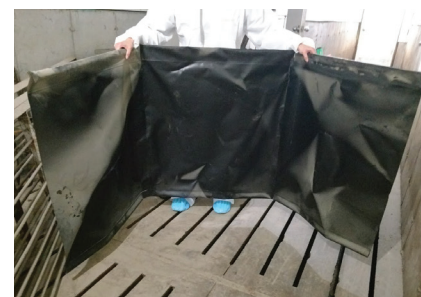


Figure 3. Matador's cape.



Electric prod

- It is only used when absolutely necessary and with strict guidelines set by the operations. (See Figure 4.)
- At no time is it appropriate to shock the animal in sensitive areas (ears, eyes, nose, genitals, and rectum). This will be considered a willful act of abuse.
- First, tap the pig without applying a shock to encourage movement.
- If it is necessary to use the prod, it should be applied to the back of the pig, behind the shoulder.
- When applied, the shock should last no more than one second and the animal should be allowed time to respond, before shocking the animal again.
- Individual animals should only receive a maximum of two shocks at the time of movement.
- Please note: When a group is stalled or bunching, shocking the pigs in the rear of the group will not facilitate movement. Caretakers should make an effort to get the lead animals moving by initiating pressure and release and not use the prod.

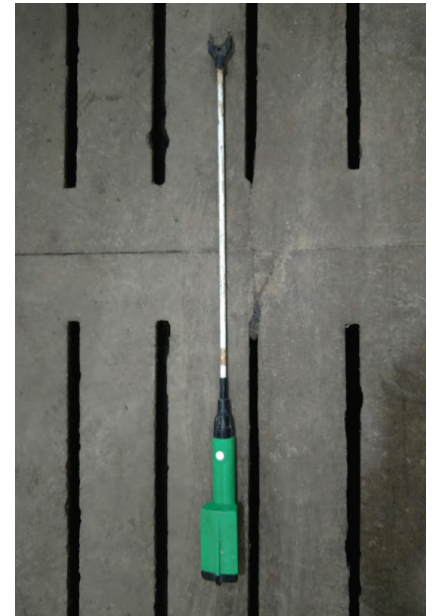


Figure 4. Electric prod.

Safety

Injuries many times can happen when caretakers are performing movement tasks. Care should be taken to avoid injuries by using the proper equipment and being aware of the environment.

Useful Information

- Equipment used to move or handle animals should only be used to guide the movement of the animals, not to cause harm.
- Reducing fear and stress levels in pigs reduces the incidence of slipping and injury.
 - » Slow, calm movements and low voices are ways to reduce pig stress.
 - » Pigs try to keep track of all handlers. Only one handler should pressure pigs at any one time.
 - » Keep pigs calm, if pigs start to become excited as seen with ears erect and bunching, release pressure.
 - » To use handling tools correctly, the handler must be in the correct position.

Related document: “Back-Up Emergency Equipment Maintenance Record Sheet”



MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. 1P-8:2019-Web-PA/RR WCAG 2.0 AA

Produced by ANR Communications & Marketing for MSU Extension (<https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/>)