



Pigs 101

Housing and Management

Having appropriate and secure housing for pigs is very important, whether raising them in an outdoor or pasture environment, indoors, or a combination. There are a number of different housing and pen options, so it is important to figure out which one works best for your situation and the pigs. Pigs require adequate shelter that will protect them from the elements and predators. A basic shelter will be sufficient, as long as it is weatherproof and dry inside. Pigs sunburn easily, particularly the lighter skinned breeds, so if they are housed outside ensuring that they have access to shade is important. As well, winter housing is an important consideration if pigs will have access to the outside all year round. The most important thing in the winter will be to provide shelter that is not too cold, protected from the wind and will remain dry even when there has been significant snowfall. A well-constructed shed or barn can be a perfect shelter, but there are other suitable options as well. For example, large bales of straw arranged in the form of a shelter are a cost effective way to house your pigs. The bales provide thick walls, insulated against the cold and damp, and the pigs can pull bedding from the inside of the bales to maintain a comfortable pack. Just remember, in a cooler housing system pigs will be consuming additional feed to stay warm which increases the cost to raise them.

Pigs are escape artists, so when constructing enclosures (indoor and outdoor), ensure they are very solid and well built. Pigs will root at any weak spots they find, eventually causing damage and potentially working their way out. Panels or walls making up pens should be high enough that the pigs can't walk over them, but also be accessible to the herds person. A good guideline for height would be at least 90 cm. Electric fence can be an effective way to protect and keep pigs with outdoor access from escaping, although it does require a certain amount of training initially. When pigs encounter an electric fence for the first time, their instinct is to bolt

forward and they end up outside of the enclosed areas. A way to avoid this would be to reinforce the presence of the electric fence by initially placing it in front of solid fencing or walls. When they encounter it and get shocked, there is something solid there to turn them around and prevent bolting forward out of the pen.

During the planning and construction/set-up phase, it would be beneficial to design a restraint area for examination or giving medication. Pigs get to be very large and are sometimes quite difficult to catch, so a simple chute to restrict movement can be very helpful. Another important area to consider would be a sick or quarantine pen. This should be easy to access and is only used when a sick pig is removed from the main pen or when adding new animals to an existing herd. It should be separate from the rest of the pigs and the pigs in this pen should not be able to contact the main herd in order to restrict the spread of disease.

Be sure to check pigs every day; keep an extra close eye on them over the first few days to make sure that they are eating, drinking, and staying within the boundaries of their pen or pasture area. It is a good idea to do a headcount to make sure that none have escaped, are stuck somewhere, or have died in an out-of-the-way location. Pigs require feed and fresh water on a daily basis, so by checking them every day these things can be quickly replenished, ensuring that sick animals are noticed and attended to without delay.

Feeders and Waterers

Growing pigs will drink 10 or more litres of water per day, so a clean, fresh supply must be maintained. This can be a challenge both due to the volume that needs to be available and the logistics of having a secure and accessible waterer. There are a number of options for watering systems, depending on how the pigs will be raised, and how long they will remain on the farm. A concrete trough or one bolted to the ground or side



of the pen would work well in a permanent location, as would a nipple drinker. If the plan is to rotate areas, a system that is easier to transport would be a better option. Watering troughs should be at a height that is accessible to the pigs at all ages and stages at which they will be using it, and at the same time high enough that they can't easily walk through it or tip it over. If it is low enough for them to walk through, they will dirty it in record time, potentially spreading disease and pathogens. Troughs also need to be secure so that the pigs don't root them over, emptying their water supply and creating mucky wallowing spots in undesirable areas.

Consideration should be given to whether water will be hauled manually on a daily basis or an automatic system will be set up. Automatic watering systems can be a great way to provide a replenishing supply of fresh, clean water. They can be bought ready to go or constructed fairly

simply out of readily available materials. This allows options for a broad range of sizes and versatility depending on how large a container is used (anywhere from lengths of PVC pipe to barrels or liquid fertilizer totes). It is important to keep automated watering-systems out of direct sunlight in the heat of summer to minimize the risk of algae and bacteria build ups. The line through which water is delivered should be a light colour, if possible, as dark coloured hoses and pipes will attract the sun and heat the water to a point where it may be too warm for the pigs to consume.

Feeders should follow similar considerations as for water troughs. The size of the feeder should be relative to the number of pigs and should be easily accessible. Also consider the method by which the feeder will be refilled; for example for a few pigs, a trough that can be refilled by hand over the side of the pen would work fine; for a larger herd that will go through feed rapidly, a larger scale hopper that could be topped off with



the bucket of a tractor or skid steer could be considered. Other important considerations for feed troughs include being weather and pest proof. In an outdoor feeding system, consider some sort of tarp or cover for the feeder that can be easily removed for filling, but will keep out the elements and deter birds and rodents.

Pastured pigs will forage on the vegetation available, but are very aggressive and can cause lasting damage to the plants in a pasture setting. If possible, periodically rotating pigs to new pasture will help protect the longevity of the pasture as well as reduce disease, parasite, and pathogen risks. The longer pigs stay in one place, the more risk there is of creating a mud hole. While pigs do like to wallow in the mud to stay cool in the summertime, they do not like to be in a damp and cold environment all the time. Between rotating to fresh areas of pasture and providing sufficient bedding (especially within the sheltered areas), the damage to the pasture



and to the pigs' health can be minimized. Straw, hay, and shavings all make good bedding as long as it isn't mouldy or too dusty. Pigs will usually choose an area of their pen that is cooler or draftier to use as their 'bathroom' area, and generally won't contaminate their 'living' area unless they are overstocked or the pen is too dirty.

Cleaning

It is important to clean the barn or housing area regularly, removing manure and bedding where conditions are damp, and top-dressing bedding as necessary. Pathogens can survive in a living area from year to year and present risks to newly introduced pigs, especially young piglets. Between batches of pigs, pens should be scraped, washed, disinfected, and dried. It is important that pens are clean before being disinfected, otherwise only the surface of the dirt is being disinfected and can later be worn down or scraped off, exposing the pigs to pathogens that have remained behind. Pressure washers, especially hot water pressure washers, do a great job of blasting off the dirt and providing a fresh surface to be disinfected before setting up again.

Handling and Transportation

When moving pigs, do so gently and without loud noises or yelling. Never use an electric prod or dogs to move pigs. A push board, which can be simply constructed from a partial sheet of plywood with holes for handles, works very well. Pigs are social animals and move better as a group rather than being singled out. When moving a larger number of pigs, whether it is to a new pasture area or onto the back of a trailer, consider constructing a temporary race for them to follow out of large bales of straw or panels. If this pathway can be made with slight bends in it (not sharp angles) so they can't see very far ahead of them, they will be more inclined to move forward as well.

Remember, being too forceful when moving pigs (particularly when loading for slaughter) can damage the meat and result in bruised areas that will be trimmed at slaughter, causing a loss of product.

It is recommended that pigs go through a fasting period of 12-18 hours before the anticipated slaughter time (*not* 12-18 hours before *transport*). The animals should have access to water whenever possible throughout this feed withdrawal period. Pigs with no feed withdrawal prior to transport are harder to handle and are more likely to suffer from dizziness, hyperventilation and vomiting.

Only animals that are fit should be loaded and transported. The NFACC code of practice defines a 'fit' animal and sets out requirements and recommendations for all aspects of pig handling and management. The code of practice can be found and referred to online at http://www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/pig_code_of_practice.pdf. An unfit animal is classified as one that is unable to stand without assistance, or move without being dragged or carried. A compromised animal, one that has a reduced capacity to withstand stress due to injury, poor

health, etc., can be transported directly to slaughter, but ensuring the animals are in suitable condition for transport is in everyone's best interest. There are a number of factors that will help you decide whether or not a pig is suitable for transport such as a decision tree found in the NFACC code of practice, but for the most part, if you are questioning if it should be loaded, it likely shouldn't.

When it comes to loading, pigs will be easier to move if they are given the opportunity to explore a new floor surface before being moved over it. This includes the ramp into the trailer, as well as the trailer bed itself. The opening into the trailer should be wide enough that the pigs fit comfortably through it. The floor should be sufficiently bedded with clean shavings, straw, or other bedding material, to provide insulation and comfort during the trip. The ramp leading into the trailer should be at a gentle angle, and the sides of the trailer should be solid to prevent escape and/or injury from sharp edges.

Weather conditions and the duration of the trip should be taken into account when planning to transport animals. The trailer will need to be warm enough in colder weather, especially when moving newly weaned animals. There will need to be sufficient air movement to keep the animals from overheating in the summer. Duration of transportation and stocking density in the trailer also play a major role in animal stress, and can be a contributor to subsequent illnesses and/or resulting meat quality.

Good management practices will go a long way to ensuring the pigs are raised in a pleasant and low stress environment, which will in turn result in a quality end product.

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