
Moving and Handling Pigs

Every day on farm, people interact with their pigs. Whether this is to vaccinate piglets or loading finishers onto the lorry, it is essential to maintain high standards of animal welfare. Animals which have been handled inappropriately can have many issues, including lameness, ruptures, poorer quality carcasses and increased condemnations at slaughter

It is often worth keeping in the back of your mind: “would you be happy if you were being filmed right now?”. If not, how could you change how you interact with your animals?

When handling pigs, it is worth considering some of their natural behaviours since this can help significantly. Your aim is to make all moves as stress free and efficient as possible, as this will ultimately save you time and prevent further issues.

Preparation is key to everything. Before moving any pigs, it is worth walking the route yourself and looking for any obstructions on the way and removing anything novel that may provide a distraction. Does the surface provide sufficient grip? When moving them, the use of non-contact movement tools such as rattles and boards, keeping calm and quiet, and moving them in stable social groups as much as possible can all help greatly.

Pigs have a good field of vision, but conversely don't have great depth perception – their snout and mouth are used extensively for investigation. Wherever possible, to reduce stress, this should be allowed, since otherwise high-pitched vocalisation and bunching can then result.

When these signs are seen, the pressure needs to be removed from the animals. Step back, pause to allow any stress to reduce, and remove anything that may have caused the stress in the first place. The calmer the stockperson, the calmer the pigs. If a stressful situation does occur, make sure everyone reviews it to improve things for next time.

Further information can be found on the AHDB website alongside several videos at <https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/moving-and-handling-pigs>. It is also worth looking at the recently updated Pig Welfare Codes and discussing on farm protocols as a team – this can help identify areas that may need extra training or review.

APHA Cost Effectiveness of Biosecurity Study Opportunity

The APHA is looking for UK producers to participate in the European BIOPIGEE project which aims to identify biosecurity practices that limit the occurrence of Salmonella and Hepatitis E virus in pig farms across Europe. Participation would involve one farm visit to collect a small number of faecal samples from the floor, and an interview on current biosecurity. All information provided will be treated in strict confidence, and Covid-19 protocols adhered to.

If this is of interest please find further information on the OneHealth EJP homepage <https://onehealthejp.eu/jrp=biopigee/>



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Are your vaccines being stored correctly?

Rosie Lyle, one of the Bishopton farm vets has recently carried out a study across 18 Yorkshire ruminant farms to investigate fridges used for vaccine storage. Data loggers were placed in the fridge where vaccines were normally stored to monitor fridge temperatures from February to April.

Throughout the study, 89% of participants recorded a temperature outside the 2-8°C range at least once, and a staggering 43% recorded temperatures outside this range for greater than half of the time. One third of the participants recorded a temperature below freezing at least once, with one farm reaching a minimum temperature of -11.5 °C .

Vaccines are an important method of disease control on farms, and can account for a significant amount of medicine costs. Storage outside of the recommended range can reduce how well they work, particularly in the case of live vaccines, so having a direct impact on herd health.

Maximum/minimum thermometers or temperature loggers should be used in medicine fridges and checked daily. In the event of any temperature failures, the manufacturer should be contacted to find out whether the vaccine can still be used. Fridges should be protected from extreme temperatures, positioned away from walls to allow airflow, and have the grill at the bottom checked to ensure that it is not blocked with dirt or debris. Further details on this study can be found at <https://www.bishoptonvets.co.uk/pigs/resources/articles/>

What are we seeing out there – Tail Biting

Unfortunately we are seeing some tail biting at the moment across a range of different production systems. Please remember that under the new welfare code, records should be kept to document evidence of tail biting, in addition to those measures instigated and how effective these have been. This is relevant on finishing units as well as farrow to finish, as the breeding units must be able to request this evidence to justify any tail docking taking place (alongside a review and approval from their veterinary surgeon).

The AHDB Tail Biting WebHAT provides a useful resource for what should be recorded and some charts for recording, specific to bath by batch, weekly diary or a continuous flow system.

<https://webhat.ahdb.org.uk/recording-tail-biting>

AHDB Tail Biting WebHAT



Arrival Date:			Source of pigs:			Tail length:	
Date	Building and Pen Number	Pen Description (Exclude enrichment used here - i.e. covered, additional or changed)	Number of Pigs in Pen	Number of Pigs with Tail Bite	Tail Docked? (Y/N)	Identification of Possible Cause and Actions Taken:	
26/12/2018	Building 4 Pen 2	Pen of mixed breeding sows. Replaced 21/12/2018	30	2	Y	Drought noticed, and door left open on 17/12/2018. Staff advised to pigs moved to hospital pen.	
Notes (precipitation, disease outbreaks, operational changes etc.)							

Feedback

Please let us know if there is anything that you would like including, or more information on, in a future newsletter.



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