Safe Pig Handling: Weaning Pigs

National Pork Board
Weaning

- Young pigs move to the next stage of production
- Sows show:
  - Behavioral signs
  - Physical signs

The sow’s instinct

- May stimulate her to protect her pigs
- May becomes a safety hazard
Removing the wean pigs

• The handlers will be using our backs and legs, observing the environment for obstacles, and clearing the path for the pigs
  o Be aware and prepared
  o Make this potentially stressful experience as calm and safe as possible
The farm must decide to

- Wean the sow before they remove the pigs

Or

- Wean the pigs before they remove the sow

There is not a right or wrong choice
There are safety hazards for both decisions

- If you remove the sow first
  - She may not want to leave her pigs
  - Be prepared for sows attempting to turn around and return to their pigs

- If you remove the pigs first
  - The sow may become agitated
  - She may try to protect her pigs
  - The sow gives the pigs less room to move
A sow is typically docile, but during weaning

- She may become aggressive if she feels her pigs are threatened
- Be mindful of your hand placement

An agitated sow may

- Bite a hand resting on the bars of her stall
- Lean against hands, arms and legs, pinning them between herself and the stall
- Step on hands or feet
Weaning involves

- Moving pigs from pen to alleyway

To safely and efficiently catch and wean pigs

- Position two people on either side of the farrowing stall

Pigs

- Are fast
- Have sharp teeth
- May squirm when being lifted

Be cautious when working around the sow’s head.
Employees should

• Work together to wean the pigs
• Be aware of their environment
  ○ Power washer lines
  ○ Heaters
  ○ Heat lamps
    – All could injure a person weaning pigs
Catching pigs requires

- Agility
- Leg strength
- Back strength

Follow safe lifting practices and never lift a pig that is too heavy for you.
To properly catch a pig

1. Securely grasp the hind leg of the pig
   - If the pig is heavy, use your other hand to grasp its other hind leg

2. Allow the pig’s front legs to help support its weight until it is in a vertical position

3. Lift the pig straight up to a height that will safely clear all gates and bars

4. If necessary, hold the pig under its ribcage to help support its weight
Remember to always
• Lift a pig with your arms and legs

Remember to never
• Lift a pig with your back
• Drop, throw or toss a pig
• Release pigs until they have two points of contact with the ground
Weaning day is stressful for

- Pigs
- People

Preparing properly can make the event less stressful and safer
To prepare for weaning

- Clear hallways of all hazards and distractions
- Secure all gates along the path of movement
- Have destination pen or trailer ready
- Work to prevent potential distractions, including people flow
When wean pigs arrive on a truck, remember

- They have traveled in a trailer under unfamiliar conditions
- They may be scared and vulnerable
To minimize their stress as the process continues

- Use their herding behavior to naturally move the pigs off the truck
  - Avoid bunching
  - Use their defensive response of circling to get them to their desired location
- Stay calm and patient
- Use irregular sound stimuli, not constant noise
Transition from the truck to the barn

- Exit off a chute
  - Set chute up to provide proper footing
  - Clear path of distractions and obstacles
  - Allow pigs to walk on their own to avoid injury, slipping, and piling up
  - Never push from behind
  - Be sure the treads on the chute are spaced appropriately
Transition from the truck to the barn continued

- Make sure the exit location is well lit
- Remove clutter and debris
- Have the significance of noise come from the handlers
- Make sure the environment is at a comfortable temperature
- Create curved paths whenever possible instead of sharp turns
As pigs enter the barn

- They will enter a large pen
- They will be sorted by weight
  - Fall-out pig = pig not getting enough nourishment and is losing weight instead of gaining weight or is injured

Handlers should

- Look for fall-out pigs
- Have pens available for them
Picking up a smaller pig

• Catch the pig by its back leg
• Hold it with its head down and back legs pointing up
  o The pig will be fully extended
  o Do not twist a pig’s leg or pick it up by the front legs
  o Never drop a pig into the pen or the alley
Setting down a smaller pig

• Allow the pig’s front feet to touch the ground
• Release its back legs carefully
• The pig should be upright on four legs
Feeding the pigs

- An important part of the process
- Should be done in a specific way to avoid injury to the handler

When lifting a feed bag

- Always use your legs to do the lifting, not your back

When lifting a feed bag from a low lying area

- Squat down to lift the bag
- Stand straight up, taking pressure off the back
When getting a feed bag from an elevated position

- Grasp the bag with both hands
- Use your arms to lift
- Use your body for stabilization
Smart handling is safe handling