

Manual PIGLOW welfare self-assessment

Loading process



PIGLOW

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Introduction

Why a welfare self-assessment of the loading process?

Because the loading process takes place at the end of the lives of the animals, it can easily be overlooked when considering animal welfare problems. However, there are many factors of the loading process that can be a cause of stress or pain to the animals. The PIGLOW welfare assessment can help you identify and become more aware of welfare indicators that are important during the loading process.

Timing and frequency of assessments

It is recommended to complete this assessment every time that animals are loaded. The assessment needs to be completed during the loading process itself.

Loading Management

The first section of the assessment contains questions related to the management of the loading process. These questions can be answered before the actual loading process starts.

Question – Drinking water

Do the animals have access to drinking water during waiting?
Record the maximum duration of water deprivation before loading (in hours)

Explanation

It is best if the animals are able to drink until the start of the loading process to avoid the animals getting dehydrated during transport.

Question – Group composition

Prior to loading (in the waiting room) the animals are / During loading the animals are

- In stable groups
- Mixed with animals from other groups

Explanation

Being mixed with unfamiliar animals from other groups could cause social stress, in the waiting room as well as during the loading process itself. It can also lead to aggression, which can cause the animals to sustain injuries during the loading process.

Loading Process

During the loading process, you will observe each group/batch of animals that is loaded. For each group, you will be asked whether you observe any occurrences of several welfare indicators.

Question – Number of pigs

Record the number of pigs in this loading group

Explanation

This information is used to determine the total amount of pigs that is observed during the loading process.

Question – Reluctant to move

Are any of the pigs in this group reluctant to move?

Explanation

If the animals are unwilling to move, this could indicate that they are experiencing fear or stress. Pigs that are reluctant to move might lead to tension in the group, which could slow down the loading process or lead to injuries.

Pigs are likely more reluctant to move if they are being forced to move too quickly or if they perceive the behaviour of the people as unpleasant. Handling of the pigs during their lives also has an impact on how they react to humans. The more positively the animals are handled before the loading process, the less likely it is that they will be fearful of humans and show aversive behaviour during the loading process.

Pigs being reluctant to move can also be caused by them being in an unfamiliar environment. If the animals have to walk on an unfamiliar floor type or have to walk a route they don't know, giving them a few seconds to familiarise themselves with the environment rather than forcing them to move will likely make the process go more smoothly.

Important aspects of the transport vehicle are the ramp and the lighting. Ramps that are less steep are easier for the animals to walk on and pigs prefer to move from a darker to a lighter area. Thus, having more lights (although not too bright) in the transport vehicle than in the holding area could reduce reluctance to move.

Risk factors

- Humans forcing the pigs to move too quickly
- Humans showing unpleasant behaviour towards the pigs
- Unfamiliar floor/route
- Steep loading ramp
- Darkness in the transport vehicle

Question – Turning back

Are any of the pigs in this group turning back?

Explanation

Pigs turning back while walking towards/into the moving truck could indicate that they are experiencing fear or stress. Pigs that are trying to turn back might lead to tension in the group, which could slow down the loading process or lead to injuries.

Pigs might be more likely to try to turn back if they are forced to move too quickly or if they perceive the behaviour of the people as unpleasant. Handling of the pigs during their lives also has an impact on how they react to humans. The more positively the animals are handled, the less likely it is that they will be fearful of humans during the loading process.

Pigs not being willing to move forward can also be caused by them being in an unfamiliar environment. If the animals have to walk on an unfamiliar floor type or have to walk a route they don't know, giving them a few seconds to familiarise themselves with the environment rather than forcing them to move will likely make the process go more smoothly.

Pigs prefer to move from a darker to a lighter area. Thus, having more lights (although not too bright) in the transport vehicle than in the holding area could reduce reluctance to move.

Risk factors

- Humans forcing the pigs to move too quickly
- Humans showing unpleasant behaviour towards the pigs
- Unfamiliar floor/route
- Darkness in the transport vehicle

Question – Slipping or falling

Are any of the pigs in this group slipping or falling?

Explanation

If the pigs are slipping or falling during the loading process, this indicates that the floor of the truck or the loading ramp is either too slippery or too steep for the pigs to walk on. This could greatly increase the number of injuries that the animals sustain during loading and transport.

Pigs falling could also indicate that the animals are being moved too quickly and that not all animals can keep up.

Risk factors

- Slippery floor of the loading truck
- Steep loading ramp
- The pigs are being moved too quickly

Question – Panting

Are any of the pigs in this group panting?

Explanation

Panting is an indicator of thermal comfort. If animals in the group are panting, this indicates that they are too hot. This could be the case because the temperature is too high, or because the stocking density is too high.

Another reason for panting could be that the animals are being forced to move too quickly.

Risk factors

- The temperature is above the limit of the thermal comfort zone
- The stocking density is too high
- Humans forcing the pigs to move too quickly

Question – Shivering

Are any of the pigs in this group shivering?

Explanation

Shivering is an indicator of thermal comfort. If animals in the group are shivering, this indicates that they are too cold.

Risk factors

- The temperature is below the limit of the thermal comfort zone

Question – Lameness

Are any of the pigs in this group lame?

Explanation

The loading process is more uncomfortable for pigs that are lame and have difficulty walking, because moving into the loading truck is more difficult for them, especially if the walking speed is influenced by other members of the group moving at the same time. A steep or slippery loading ramp will also make it more challenging for lame pigs to enter the vehicle.

If a pig is severely lame, however, EU regulations state that it should not be transported for slaughter.

More information on risk factors for the development of lameness can be found in the manuals for fattening pigs and sows.

Risk factors

- Steep loading ramp
- Slippery floor
- The pigs are being moved too quickly

Question – Sickness

Are any of the pigs in this group sick?

Explanation

The loading process could be more uncomfortable for pigs that are sick, because weakness could make it physically difficult for the animals to move or to mentally process what is happening. Both things are likely to slow the animals, and therefore the loading process, down. It could also lead to injuries if sick animals impede the movement of the other pigs.

More information on risk factors for sickness can be found in the manuals for fattening pigs and sows.

Risk factors

- Unfamiliar floor/route
- Steep loading ramp
- Slippery floor

Remarks

At the end of the assessment you will have the opportunity to add remarks. In this field, please record any additional information that might be relevant for the interpretation of the results of the assessment. This could be things such as a heat wave or a recent disease outbreak.

Results and feedback

To see the results of your assessment and receive automated feedback, upload your answers by clicking on the cloud icon (figure B). The answers can only be uploaded in a location with internet access. Before uploading your answers, please confirm whether your assessment is accurate and valid. If you select "no", you will still receive your personal results, but your data will not be used for benchmarking.

After uploading the answers, you will receive a report in PDF format with your results by e-mail. The results are compiled by calculating percentages for many of the answers that you have given to all the questions. Each question is linked to a w, such as "good health" or "good housing". In the report, the answers of questions in the same category will be shown together to give a clearer overview of the types of aspects that you score well or less well on. If you have a low score for multiple questions in the same category, this means that improvements can be made to, for example, management practices or factors of housing related to that category that would lead to better animal welfare.

The e-mail with the report will contain a link to a more extensive version of the report on the PIGLOW website (www.piglow.eu). There you can consult all your reports and the risk factors for all welfare indicators (using your e-mail address and password of the PIGLOW app).

If you confirmed that you performed an accurate and valid assessment, you can see (under the header "reports") how your results compare to those of (anonymous) other farms. The comparison will be shown in the column "benchmarking". For each question for which benchmarking is possible, this column will contain "Pxx" where "xx" are two numbers indicating the percentage of farms that scored lower than yours. For example, P10 means that 10% of the farms have a lower score and 90% have a higher score. P70 means that 70% of the farms have a lower score and 30% have a higher score. Thus, the higher the number, the better you scored compared to other farms. However, a low percentile-score does not necessarily mean that your farm performs badly on that welfare indicator.

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