



FACT SHEET

EUTHANASIA METHODS AND DECISIONS

Introduction

The term “euthanasia” means “good death”. All persons working with pigs must be able to recognise when it is appropriate to euthanase a pig – otherwise the pig’s welfare is compromised. Key points to consider about euthanasia include:

- Human safety — staff must be trained to avoid possible injury to themselves or others;
- Pig welfare — the method must minimise pain and distress to the pig;
- Practicality — the method must be affordable, easy to learn and repeatable;
- Aesthetics — should not be unpleasant for the person administering the procedure;
- Suitability — the method must be suited to the size of the pig; and
- Location — the procedure must be done in a safe, quiet and private location.

Below are guidelines on how to identify and deal with sick and injured pigs. These steps should include:

- **Identification:** After a sick pig is identified the first decision is whether the animal will likely respond to treatment. Seek veterinary advice if you are unsure of this. If it will, then appropriate treatment should be administered. If not, the pig should be euthanised or removed to a holding pen for slaughter as a casualty pig. Sick pigs should be tagged or marked with paint or crayon.
- **Treatment:** Treatment can be administered in the pen where the pig is found or it can be cared for in a special hospital pen. Sick pigs should be moved to a hospital pen if they are unable to fend for themselves (e.g. easy access to feed and water), if they are losing body condition and/or are likely to be abused by the other pigs. Pigs that recover post-treatment may be returned to the main group (if they are deemed competitive and in good body condition), or otherwise be retained in a hospital/recovery pen or sent for salvage slaughter (assuming they are clear of any medication withhold periods).

- **Euthanasia:** Pigs should be euthanased if they are in severe pain (particularly despite treatment with anti-inflammatories/pain relievers), if they do not respond to treatment within three days, if they are unable to self-feed/water or if it is not economic to keep them.

Transport to slaughter or euthanase?

In deciding how to dispose of a sick pig the farmer needs to consider not only the economic implications but also the animal’s welfare and the impact on public health. Pigs that are unable to walk or that are sick and unlikely to recover should be euthanased on the farm and not sent to slaughter or market. Sick pigs should not be penned in transport with normal pigs and their individual needs for transport should be addressed. Sick pigs that cannot be transported to slaughter and have not responded to treatment should be euthanased.

Regardless of the method chosen, euthanasia is usually stressful for the operator. However, if euthanasia is performed professionally, the stress to the operator and pig will be minimised. Euthanasia should result in a painless death.

The People

Producers should be aware that it will be a requirement of the state regulations in some states¹ that euthanasia is performed by a person who has been deemed ‘competent’. The industry strongly recommends that there is at least one person on farm that has received formal training and been assessed as competent in euthanasia.

Employees who perform euthanasia should have the tools available to determine which pigs need to be euthanased. Careful consideration should be given to the process that identifies pigs for euthanasia.

A step-by-step protocol should be developed for each pig age group, and proper training should be developed to ensure that each employee has a thorough understanding of the process. The euthanasia protocol should minimise pig suffering and guarantee a quick death.

¹ SA – South Australia Animal Welfare Variation Regulations 2009 under the *Animal Welfare Act 1985*



The Process

Wherever possible, pigs should not be euthanased in the presence of other pigs. Distressed pigs will vocalise and release odors or pheromones that can upset other pigs in the area. The most important part of the process is that only trained technicians should perform euthanasia.

The euthanasia process can be divided into three stages. First, the pig is physically restrained in a way that minimises pain and distress. Larger animals may be restrained using a nose snare or placed in a race to restrict the animal's movements. It is then killed in a quick and painless way in accordance with animal welfare regulations and statutory requirements. Finally, the pig is checked to ensure it is dead.

The Agents

A good euthanasia agent should:

- Result in death without pain;
- Produce a rapid loss of consciousness;
- Produce a rapid death;
- Be reliable;
- Be safe for personnel;
- Minimise animal stress;
- Be nonreversible;
- Be nontraumatic for the operator; and
- Be economic.

Captive Bolt Pistol

The purpose of both the captive bolt and stunning is to render the animal unconscious. Animals must be adequately restrained to ensure proper placement of the captive bolt. Penetrating captive bolt stunning is suitable for pigs between approximately 10 kg and 100 kg liveweight. The captive bolt is a stunning device, so pigs should bleed out after stunning.

Gunshot

Under some circumstances, gunshot may be the only practical method of euthanasia. Highly skilled and trained personnel using a rifle or pistol appropriate for the situation should perform it. The projectile should be accurately placed to enter the brain, causing instant unconsciousness.

Advantages – (1) Euthanasia is instantaneous; and (2) under field conditions, gunshot may be the only effective method available.

Disadvantages – (1) It could be dangerous to personnel; (2) it is aesthetically unpleasant; and (3) under field conditions it may be difficult to hit the brain. (4) a firearms licence is required to use a gun.

Recommendation – When other methods cannot be used, competently performed gunshot is an acceptable method of euthanasia.

Stunning (Blunt trauma)

Stunning can render an animal unconscious; however, unconsciousness will occur only if a blow to the head is properly executed. If not performed correctly, various degrees of consciousness with concomitant pain will ensue. Stunning should only be conducted on pigs that are small enough to be easily controlled by the handler – usually < 10 kg.

Advantages – (1) Stunning is humane when properly performed.

Disadvantages – (1) Stunning is inhumane if improperly performed; (2) it is impossible to ensure constancy of performance by personnel; (3) stunning may be aesthetically displeasing for personnel performing or observing the procedure; and (4) it must be followed by other means to ensure the death of the unconscious animal.

Recommendations – Stunning must be followed by other means to ensure death of the unconscious animal.

Euthanasia Action Plan

Work with your veterinarian to develop a euthanasia action plan appropriate for each stage of production on your farm.

The plan should be kept in an obvious location in the shed. Review the plan with employees assigned to euthanase pigs, annually as part of your QA internal audit and annually with your veterinarian.

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