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DISCLAIMER
The primary purpose of the Humane Handling of Compromised Pigs: Standards for Assessment and Care of Unfit Animals is to assist producers in making responsible animal care decisions.

It is important to note that while the authors have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the Humane Handling of Compromised Pigs: Standards for Assessment and Care of Unfit Animals, this should not be considered the final word on the areas of law and practice. Seek the advice of appropriate professionals and experts as the facts of each situation may differ from those set out in the Humane Handling of Compromised Pigs: Standards for Assessment and Care of Unfit Animals.

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The Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc. (FACS) is a membership-based, non-profit organization that represents the livestock industry in advancing responsible welfare, care and handling practices in agriculture. FACS endeavors to raise producer awareness of the economic and ethical benefits of animal welfare and help consumers achieve a greater understanding of animal care issues.

Produced September 2003
HUMANE HANDLING OF COMPROMISED PIGS
STANDARDS FOR ASSESSMENT AND CARE OF UNFIT ANIMALS

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DEFINITIONS/GLOSSARY

ABSCESS: A localized occurrence of pus in a cavity of disintegrated tissue.

ANIMAL WELFARE: The well-being of an animal. Animals must be thriving and free from disease, injury and malnutrition. Well-being implies freedom from suffering in the sense of prolonged pain, fear, distress, discomfort, hunger, thirst and other negative experiences. Short-term negative states, such as short-term pain, hunger and anxiety, are virtually inevitable in animal life, and the borderline between acceptable and unacceptable will remain a source of debate.

ARTHITIS: Inflammation of the joint, characterized by progressive locomotory difficulty and increasing time spent in a recumbent position with the affected joint flexed.

CANNIBALISM: When an animal feeds on others of its own kind.

DISTRESS: An emotional state of an organism resulting from excessive fear, loss of a companion or object with which it has a strong psychological bond, physical discomfort, food or water deprivation, pain, etc.

EUTHANASIA: A painless killing without fear, anxiety or pain on the part of the subjected organism (by derivation, it means easy death).

PAIN: An unpleasant sensation occurring in varying degrees of severity as a result of injury, disease or emotional disorder. Signs of pain and suffering in a pig include one or more of the following:
- Unwillingness to rise to its feet.
- Unwillingness to walk.
- Vocalization when prodded to rise or move.
- Reluctant to put a leg on the ground and bear weight.
- Trembling.
- Mouth open, breathing fast.
- Arched back and abdomen tucked up.
- Head down, ears drooping, tail uncurled.
- Unwilling to eat or drink.
- Standing separate from group, not following group.
- Does not respond when touched or prodded.

PROLAPSE: Protrusion of an organ or part of an organ from its normal position due to inadequate strength of supportive tissue (e.g., anal, cloacal or vaginal prolapse).

SUFFERING: A highly unpleasant emotional state associated with more-than-minimal pain or distress. The state of an organism enduring a noxious experience.
It is completely unacceptable for unfit animals - those that are sick, injured or would suffer unduly if not handled properly - to be transported to market. These animals require immediate action. Legislation and animal welfare standards in Saskatchewan establish standards for the euthanasia or slaughter of unfit hogs. Producers and others who handle animals must carry out the necessary due diligence. This is not only to ensure they understand their responsibilities, but also to demonstrate they have carried them out.

Saskatchewan pork producers have made proper care of hogs an industry priority. This is not only responsible action for producers and the industry, it is an expectation of today’s society. Consumers are concerned about animal care and often make food-buying decisions based on animal care practices. Food companies, retailers and restaurant chains in North America and Europe, are now dictating specific animal care guidelines and standards to their suppliers.

STANDARDS FOR HUMANE HANDLING OF COMPROMISED PIGS

Marketing unfit hogs is unacceptable and it is the responsibility of anyone owning or handling pigs to ensure this does not occur.

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OBJECTIVE:
To provide standards for live animal assessment to anyone who handles hogs to ensure appropriate, humane handling of unfit swine, as required by law and animal welfare standards.

This manual and the accompanying poster for handling compromised pigs feature quick-reference illustrations and descriptions that allow producers and anyone handling hogs to clearly understand the standards for humane handling of unfit hogs. It is designed to assist in making responsible decisions on the job.

While not intended to set treatment protocol, these materials help to reinforce the law and the ethics of responsible animal care. Enforcement agencies will use this manual and the producer’s due diligence as guidelines for what are considered generally accepted practices and what are not.
Questions to Consider:
• Are drug withdrawal times met?
• Is the animal fit for human consumption?
• Can the animal be humanely loaded and transported?

Standards for Handling Unfit Swine

Key Decisions:

1. **DO NOT SHIP**
   - **EUTHANIZE ON-FARM**
     - These animals will be condemned at plant if shipped:
       • Emaciation
       • Rectal stricture
       • Multiple abscesses
       • Arthritis
       (more than two joints)
   - **EUTHANIZE OR SLAUGHTER FOR FOOD ON-FARM**
     - • Class 3 lameness (downer)
     - • Prolapsed uterus

2. **SHIP DIRECTLY TO NEAREST SUITABLE SLAUGHTER FACILITY**
   - These animals have health conditions that are painful and require special handling:
     • Rectal prolapse
     • Hernias
     • Tail-bitten pigs
     • Flank and ear-bitten pigs
     • Pigs with minor cuts and wounds
     • Class 2 lameness

3. **DELAY SHIPPING**
   - • Recent castrations
   - • Pregnant cull sows
   - • Pigs with major cuts and wounds

It is also highly important that producers identify less severe conditions early. These pigs should either be treated according to the recommendations of a veterinarian or shipped early to minimize pain, discomfort and prevent the condition from deteriorating. When shipped, the animals should be segregated in the truck or in a separate trailer to prevent trampling and trauma from other pigs.
I. CONDITIONS THAT RESULT IN CONDEMNATION

STOP  DO NOT SHIP • EUTHANIZE ON-FARM

Pigs with conditions that will result in condemnation at slaughter should not be shipped even if shipping would not cause stress or humane problems. If producers can recognize conditions that will result in condemnation, they can euthanize the animal on-farm for humane reasons.

Early recognition of conditions that can progress and result in condemnation (and/or euthanasia) may allow for early treatment, shipping and salvage of an animal.

EMACIATION: (WASTED PIGS)

Emaciation is the term used to describe animals in poor body condition. Emaciation can be a sign of other diseases and conditions. Emaciated pigs are very narrow in the loin, have a hollow flank area, ribs and backbones that can be easily seen or felt, and pin bones of the pelvis that are easily felt. As well, emaciated pigs sometimes have a rough or long hair coat.

At processing, emaciated pigs have little or no internal fat and may have a jelly-like substance in the spine and between muscles.

PRODUCER ACTION:
• Be aware of the animal’s condition and ship before it becomes too thin.
• If practical and humane, feed until the animal shows good condition. However, if there is no evidence of rapid improvement in body condition, euthanize on-farm. It is important that every action has been taken to alleviate the poor condition of the pig.
• Euthanize all emaciated pigs on-farm. Do not ship for slaughter.
**RECTAL STRICTURE: (BLOATED, RAZOR-BACK)**

Rectal stricture can result from birth defects, rectal injuries or previous infections, (e.g. prolapse or diarrhea). A scar forms that makes the opening too small for most or all manure to pass through the rectum. This condition is irreversible and there is no treatment.

In the early stages, when the pig is in good condition and bloating is not obvious, the pig may be salvageable if shipped immediately. NOTE: The early stages can be difficult to detect. However, pigs with rectal strictures quickly stop eating and lose weight. They will appear pot-bellied because of trapped contents in the gut, and will be thin or emaciated higher up. These pigs will not respond to treatment and once bloated and emaciated, must not be shipped.

**PRODUCER ACTION:**
- Ship only if in very early stages and pig is in good condition.
- Otherwise, euthanize on-farm. Do not ship for slaughter.

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**MULTIPLE ABSCESSES**

While some abscesses can be treated on-farm, in the case of multiple abscesses (that do not respond rapidly to treatment), the pig should be euthanized on-farm. Multiple abscesses are often a sign of an infection affecting body tissue, which makes the carcass unfit for consumption. Usually, if three or more abscesses are visible on the animal, there may be additional abscesses internally. If the pig has no problems walking and is in good condition, the pig can be shipped, but the producer should not be surprised if it is condemned because of additional internal abscesses.

Pigs with abscesses that cause pain or difficulty in walking will be discussed in the next section.

**PRODUCER ACTION:**
- Ship pigs with abscesses only if they are in good condition and have no difficulty walking.
- Do not keep pigs with abscesses. Take action. Ship or treat as soon as the abscess is visible.
- Otherwise, euthanize on-farm.
ARTHITIS

A pig may be condemned at slaughter if there are more than two joints affected, even if it isn’t severely lame with arthritis. A good rule then is, if there are three or more visible joints affected or the pig is in poor body condition, the pig should be euthanized on-farm. Action for arthritis is dealt with in the next section, which evaluates pigs by the degree of lameness.

PRODUCER ACTION:
• Detect arthritis early and either treat appropriately or ship promptly. (Use guidelines in the next section.)
• Do not ship if three or more joints are affected or pig is in poor body condition. Euthanize on-farm.

DO NOT SHIP • EUTHANIZE OR SLAUGHTER FOR FOOD ON-FARM

These conditions require an animal to be either euthanized or slaughtered for food on-farm.

PROLAPSED UTERUS

Sows and gilts with a prolapsed uterus must receive immediate appropriate treatment or be immediately euthanized. Under no circumstances are they fit for transport or slaughter.

PRODUCER ACTION:
• Treat appropriately or euthanize on-farm.

CLASS 3 LAMENESS

Lameness can be classified into three categories. Class 1 and 2 will be discussed later. Class 3 pigs include: downed pigs, pigs that will not walk, pigs that move only if encouraged, pigs with a broken leg, as well as pigs that are extremely reluctant to move. Producers are not permitted to load or ship Class 3 lame pigs.

PRODUCER ACTION:
• Must not load or transport.
• Same day on-farm slaughter or euthanasia.
2. HEALTH CONDITIONS THAT ARE PAINFUL AND REQUIRE SPECIAL HANDLING

SHIP DIRECTLY TO NEAREST SUITABLE SLAUGHTER FACILITY

Do not transport pigs that are obviously suffering. Handle promptly by treating appropriately, slaughtering or euthanizing on-farm.

When shipping, pigs with less severe conditions, including minor abscesses, mild to moderate lameness, or rectal prolapses, must be segregated on the truck or in a separate trailer to prevent trampling and trauma from other pigs.

It is important that these pigs are identified early and either treated to minimize pain and discomfort or shipped early to prevent the condition worsening. Appropriate treatment should be based on discussion with a veterinarian.

LAMENESS

Pigs can be affected with various leg problems, ranging from mild to crippling, non-painful to extremely painful. Some examples of conditions that cause leg problems are arthritis, abscesses, fractures and skin ulcers in the joint area.

In order to deal with leg problems, it is important to objectively determine an animal’s pain or lameness. Assess and handle the animal accordingly. The following classes of lameness should help producers determine the severity of the lameness and make the best treatment decision.

To determine lameness, the whole pig must be assessed. A pig may be only moderately lame, but if it is also in poor condition and has other problems, it will likely be condemned. Conditions should not be viewed separately; the pig’s whole situation and condition must be considered.

Class 1 Lameness:
Visibly lame, but able to get up on its own and keep up with a group of normal, healthy pigs. Little or no evidence of pain when moving.

PRODUCER ACTION:
• If shipping, load and transport the same as healthy pigs. If treatment has been administered, ensure withdrawal times are followed.

Class 2 Lameness:
Visibly lame, requires assistance to rise, but once up, can move quite well and walk up ramps without help.

PRODUCER ACTION:
• Monitor and isolate until fully recovered or ship segregated in the truck or trailer. Can be grouped with other Class 2 pigs of same weight class. Must go directly to closest slaughter.
Class 3 Lameness:
As discussed earlier, Class 3 Lameness includes downed pigs and those that will not walk, those that move only if encouraged, pigs with a broken leg, as well as pigs that are extremely reluctant to move. Producers are not permitted to load or ship Class 3 lame pigs.

**PRODUCER ACTION:**
- Must not load or transport.
- Same day on-farm slaughter or euthanasia.

RECTAL PROLAPSE

Pigs with rectal prolapses must be immediately segregated to prevent other pigs from cannibalizing the prolapse and causing further trauma. Affected pigs should be treated promptly or shipped to prevent infection.

**PRODUCER ACTION:**
- Immediately segregate pigs with rectal prolapses.
- A rectal prolapse should not be ignored, as it may become infected.
- Treat appropriately or ship promptly in separate compartment.
- If a rectal prolapse becomes uncontrollably infected, euthanize on-farm.

HERNIAS

Hernias are a rupture or protrusion of an organ or part of an organ through an opening in the surrounding wall. Common sites include the navel or groin.

In many cases, when the hernias are not large enough to be a problem, the animals can simply be monitored until they reach market weight. However, action must be taken early before the swelling becomes so large that it touches the ground or causes the skin to split open because of the pressure. Severe hernias should not be allowed to reach the point of skin damage, or to cause the animals to lose condition or have difficulty walking.

**PRODUCER ACTION:**
- For most hernias, monitor and slaughter at market weight or earlier if necessary. For medium-sized hernias, ship promptly in separate compartment to avoid injury by other pigs.
- For large hernias that touch the ground, cause difficulty walking or skin scraping, euthanize on-farm.
TAIL-BITTEN PIGS

Segregate tail-bitten pigs to prevent other pigs from cannibalizing the injured pig. Treat early to prevent infection from spreading to the spine or other parts of the body. Market early, if necessary. Sometimes small abscesses in the spine can result from the tail bite. If the rest of the carcass is in good condition, and has no other abscess sites, the pig usually passes inspection. The longer a bitten pig is left without treatment, the greater the risk of the infection spreading, abscesses enlarging and the animal being condemned.

PRODUCER ACTION:
- Treat or ship tail-bitten pigs promptly to reduce chance of condemnation.
- Producer must demonstrate steps taken to correct the problem.
- For severe herd situations, consult a herd veterinarian.
- If the pig is showing spinal incoordination (wobbly), euthanize on-farm.
- If large, open wound, euthanize on-farm.

FLANK- AND EAR-BITTEN PIGS

See Cuts and Wounds below.

CUTS AND WOUNDS

If a pig is cut or wounded, producers must assess the severity of the injury.

PRODUCER ACTION:
Assess and act immediately.

MILD TO MODERATE:
- Small to moderate-sized wound, but pig can move freely and isn’t in severe pain.
- Separate, treat or ship in separate compartment.

SEVERE:
- Large wound and pig is in severe pain.
- Treat immediately, slaughter or euthanize on-farm.
3. SOWS AND BOARS

DELAY SHIPPING

This section applies to cull sows and boars rather than replacement breeding stock. These animals must be segregated when transported. Boars must be detusked (see specific legislation).

Most culled sows and boars are transported long distances over several days. Many go to out-of-province slaughter facilities. It is therefore important to evaluate their condition and determine whether the pigs can withstand a long journey and changes in weather without suffering any distress.

Only healthy and fit animals in good flesh should be shipped to an auction market or assembly yard. Those in poor physical condition must be shipped directly to local slaughter facilities. Sows or boars that are in poor physical condition should be shipped for local slaughter only.

RECENT CASTRATIONS

It is not acceptable to market boars that have been recently castrated. These boars must be given three to four weeks to recover, to allow the incision to heal and the swelling to go down.

PRODUCER ACTION:

• Allow castrated pigs to heal completely before marketing.

PREGNANT CULL SOWS

It is illegal to ship any animal if it is probable that the animal will give birth during the journey. Stress can cause sows to abort or go into labour early. Cull sows that are more than 80 days pregnant must not be shipped.

PRODUCER ACTION:

• Do not ship any sows that are visibly pregnant.
EUTANASIA GUIDELINES

Euthanasia is defined as a humane death occurring without pain or distress. When it is impractical for a veterinarian to perform the procedure, it is the responsibility of the handler to do so. When it is determined animals must be humanely killed, do not delay the process. Do it immediately.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER:
• Human safety: staff must be trained to avoid possible injury.
• Pig welfare: method must minimize pain or distress to animal.
• Practicality: method must be affordable, easy to learn and repeatable.
• Suitability: for certain sizes of pigs.
• Location: safe, quiet and private location.

There are three ways to euthanize swine. Each method must be reliable, repeatable, irreversible, simple, safe and rapid for the animal.

1. Gunshot or Captive Bolt
• Stun or kill by injuring and penetrating the brain.
• Should not be used on piglets less than three weeks old due to their small size.
• Older animals may only be stunned by captive bolt method. The carotid or brachial artery must be severed once the animal is unconscious.
• Animals must be secured; users should be trained properly.

2. Blunt Trauma
• Sharp, firm blow with a heavy instrument on the top of the head.
• Only for use on piglets less than three weeks old.
• The blow must be delivered with sufficient force in order to prevent just stunning the animal.

3. Anesthetic Overdose
• Veterinarian must perform the procedure.
• Barbiturates and pentobarbital combinations depress central nervous system, causing deep anesthesia, progressing to respiratory and cardiac arrest.
• Carcasses cannot be disposed of naturally. Ensure scavengers cannot access the dead animal.

Immediate confirmation of death is a must. Signs of instant death are:
• The standing animal will collapse.
• The tongue should hang out and be straight and limp.
• When a captive bolt is used, the eyes should be wide open with a blank stare. The animal should never blink or have an eye reflex in response to touch.
• No rhythmic breathing or heartbeat should be evident.
• There should be no response to a nose pinch.
• There should be no vocalization.

If any signs of life are still present, the same procedure must be repeated or an alternative approach must be used to kill the animal.
HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT (TRANSPORTATION)

Under the Health of Animals Act:

IT IS ILLEGAL TO:

• Transport a sick or injured animal where undue suffering will result, or when the animal is liable to give birth.
• Continue to transport an animal that is injured, becomes ill, or is otherwise unfit to travel.
• Load or unload animals in a way that would cause injury or undue suffering.
• Crowd animals to such an extent as to cause injury or undue suffering.
• Transport animals if injury or suffering is likely to be caused by inadequate construction of the vehicle, insecure fittings, undue exposure to the weather or inadequate ventilation.
• Use ramps, gangplanks or chutes that are inadequately constructed or maintained and would be likely to cause injury or undue suffering to the animals.
• Confine monogastric animals, such as horses and pigs, in a motor vehicle for longer than 36 hours unless the animals are fed, watered and rested on a vehicle that is suitably equipped for the purpose.
• Load an animal for a trip of more than 24 hours without first providing food and water within 5 hours before loading.

YOU MUST:

• Segregate animals of different species, of substantially different weights and ages, or if incompatible by nature.
• Allow animals to stand in a natural position.
• Provide for drainage and absorption of urine.
• Either spread sand or have the vehicle fitted with safe footholds in addition to adequate bedding.
• Ensure that animals unloaded for feed, water and rest remain at least 5 hours, and longer, if necessary, for all of the animals to have access to feed and water.

CRIMINAL CODE OF CANADA

The Criminal Code states you are guilty of an offence if you:

• Willfully cause or allow unnecessary pain, suffering, or injury to an animal.
• By willful neglect cause injury to animals while they are being transported.
• Abandon an animal or fail to provide it with enough suitable food, water, shelter and care.

MEAT INSPECTION ACT

Every registered establishment in which food animals are slaughtered must have:

• Loading and unloading facilities.
• Outside shipping and receiving areas that are paved and adequately drained.
• A separate area to accommodate crates or pens for:
  a) the housing and inspection of food animals;
  b) segregation of animals where necessary;
  c) holding of condemned, suspect, injury, or sick animals.
• Facilities and equipment for:
  a) restraining food animals for ante mortem;
  b) conveying injured or disabled animals in a humane manner;
  c) slaughtering condemned food animals.
• Facilities with secure footing for food animals during movement.
• Pens that provide adequate ventilation, space, and potable water and feed if the animal is held for more than 24 hours.

Every food animal that is slaughtered shall, before being bled:

• Be rendered unconscious in a manner that ensures it does not regain consciousness before death.

All people engaged in the handling and slaughtering of food animals should:

• Not subject the animals to avoidable distress or pain.
• Restrict the use of goads and electrical prods.
• Ensure no goad or electrical prod is applied to the anal, genital or facial region of an animal.
• Separate animals that are diseased, injured or potentially dangerous.
The Act States:

No person responsible for an animal shall cause or permit an animal to be or to continue to be in distress. 

An animal is in distress if it is:

• deprived of adequate food, water, care or shelter;  
• injured, sick, in pain or suffering; or  
• abused or neglected.

An animal is not considered to be in distress if it is:

• handled in a manner consistent with a standard or code of conduct, criteria, practice or procedure that is prescribed as acceptable; or  
• the distress occurs while carrying out generally accepted practices of animal management (i.e., branding of calves, slaughter of livestock).

Any animal protection officer may be a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a member of a municipal police service, or a person appointed as an animal protection officer (this includes officers of the Saskatchewan SPCA). Any animal protection officer, without a warrant, during ordinary business hours, may enter any premises, other than a private dwelling, where animals are kept for sale, hire, or exhibition. Where an animal is found in distress, the animal protection officer may legally take any action necessary to relieve the animal’s distress where the person responsible for the animal does not promptly take steps to relieve the animal’s distress or if the owner cannot be found immediately. These expenses may be the responsibility of the owner.

The officer may be accompanied by any specialist or expert whom he/she considers necessary to carry out the search and seizure or to diagnose and assist the distressed animal.

No person operating, or in charge of any premises, other than a private dwelling, where animals are kept for sale, hire or exhibition shall refuse to permit an animal protection officer to enter the premises during ordinary business hours.

A person responsible for an animal includes a person who owns an animal, has custody or control of an animal, or has custody or charge of a minor and the minor is the owner of the animal.

THE ANIMAL PRODUCTS ACT

This Act deals in part with the transportation of animals and parallels federal regulations set out in the Health of Animals Act. See the Federal Act for further information.

THE VETERINARY PROFESSION ACT

The Act states that no person other than a registered veterinarian can engage in the practice of veterinary medicine. The act does not apply to individuals carrying out the following activities:

• the castration of pigs.  
• ear-notching.  
• the docking of pigs.  
• providing first aid to an animal in an emergency (without remuneration).

REQUIREMENTS FOR ASSEMBLY YARDS

Operators or livestock assembly yards must provide animals with:

• Adequate protection from wind and sun.  
• A concrete floor.  
• Bedding.  
• Water readily available.  
• Adequate pens.  
• Adequate loading facilities during all weather conditions.  
• Tattooing equipment capable of producing tattoos that are clearly legible.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

• Euthanasia in Pigs: Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan.  
• Farm Animal Welfare Database of Research: www.prairieswine.com  
• Humane Handling of Swine: Standards for the Care of Unfit Animals: Alberta Pork.  
• Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.  
• Welfare Issues Resource Centre: Prairie Swine Centre Inc.  

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Canadian Food Inspection Agency  
(306) 975-4185 - Saskatoon  
(306) 780-5220 - Regina

Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan  
(306) 249-3227

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and Rural Revitalization  
(306) 787-6069 - Provincial Veterinarian - Food Safety & Animal Health  
Sask Pork  
(306) 244-7752

Saskatchewan Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals  
(306) 382-7722