

Just the Facts!

Swine Welfare

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Pigs that are well cared for will grow faster and be healthier. A pig that receives good care from their caretaker will have improved welfare. The definition of welfare is: the state of an animal as it attempts to cope with its environment. For example, if pigs become too hot they find ways to cool themselves, like panting, drinking water, or lying in water to evaporate their body heat. If a pig becomes too cold they will huddle together with other pigs, cover themselves in bedding or lay near a heater.

How can you measure welfare?

Welfare can be measured by looking at the pigs' behavior, performance, health, and hormone levels. Behavior can be measured by how often the pig eats, drinks, and how that pig interacts with other pigs. Performance measures are how much feed they eat and how fast they grow. Health can be measured by how often the pig has a disease and gets sick. Simple ways to see this would be if a pig no longer eats or has a cough, runny nose or perhaps sneezes a lot. Hormones can affect pigs' health and stress levels, although we don't easily measure hormone levels on the farm.

Producer responsibilities

The most important part of animal welfare is the skills of the person who cares for the pigs. Any caretaker who looks after pigs has certain responsibilities:

- Look at the pigs every day;
- Give pigs the right amount of clean food and water;
- Make sure that the food has the right level of nutrients—protein, energy, vitamins and minerals;
- Provide a comfortable thermal environment – some way for the pigs to warm up or cool down;
- Provide the correct amount of space for the pigs to lay down and eat and drink;
- No tolerance for abuse (hurting) of any pigs by a caretaker;
- Know your veterinarian and how to contact him or her;
- Provide medical care if pigs get sick.

Pigs can sometimes get sick and are unable to get better. Ask your veterinarian to humanely put pigs to sleep if this should occur.

Caretakers should be trained in pig care. This can be done by going to meetings or workshops, taking online computer courses and learning from people with experience working with pigs.

Swine Welfare Assurance ProgramSM (SWAPSM 2003)

SWAP is a tool that can help producers assess their pigs' welfare on the farm. It looks at the records that a producer keeps, the appearance and performance of the animals and the housing that the pigs are kept in. It is based on science, and has nine Care and Well-being Principles. SWAP builds on these other Checkoff information and programs:

- The Pork Quality Assurance ProgramTM (PQATM; 2002);
- The Swine Care Handbook (2003); and
- The On-Farm Euthanasia of Swine – Options for the Producer (2001).
- The SWAP Producer Code of Practice helps all caretakers understand what is expected of them (NPB, 2002).

Conclusion

The Pork Checkoff has many useful tools that producers can use in training, education and assessment of pigs on the farm to improve the producer's knowledge on pig welfare. Good care results in good pig welfare.