

Low stress (pig, cow, sheep) handling



Sophie Atkinson



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What are “good” handling or “low stress” methods

- **Reduces, minimises, stops or prevents escape, refusal, aggressive or nervous animal behaviours**
- **Reduces, minimises, stops or prevents the need for hard physical force (hits, slaps, yells, prods etc).**
- **Maximises cooperative animal behaviour by reducing communication breakdowns (conflicts) during human animal interactions**



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Keys areas relevant to communication with livestock

1. Understanding the flight Zone
2. Handler position in respect to the animal group or individuals
3. Correct use of pressure & release



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- Pressure
(is our approach, pen walls, another animal, noise)
- release (is our back off) when we reach the flight zone indicated when pigs move away
- Our approach (or pressure) must have the right attitude, speed, angle & distance which is dependent on **animal reaction**

This is the key to gaining control & cooperation in the livestock



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- ▶ **Handlers** need to recognize cues that pigs are getting scared and release their pressure so they calm down and stay responsive
 - ▶ **VISION:** Pigs want to see anything that is a potential threat and try to keep handlers out of their blind spots
 - ▶ **HEARING:** Pigs can't always watch their handlers so use hearing to track people they can't see. Listening often involves holding still
So noise (paddles) can cause stops

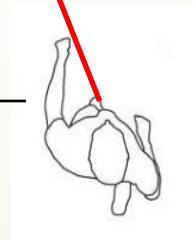
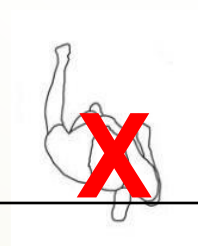


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Work where the animal can see you



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- ▶ **When panicked by handler pigs tend to fight to get back from where they came and push back into the handler**
- ▶ **It is important that handlers avoid crowding or touching pigs while moving them (de-sensitises the pigs)**



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Pigs track their handlers more closely as:

- ▶ the handlers become more threatening
- ▶ They get more scared
- ▶ the space becomes more confined

Pigs tell us what they are paying attention to with their body language

where they are looking, how they are bending or twisting their bodies, how they have their heads and ears positioned



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The following will release pressure on the pigs and facilitate forward movement if they stop:

- ▶ pause
- ▶ step back
- ▶ Step in towards pigs
- ▶ Step back again
- ▶ Turn body away from the pigs
- ▶ Soften body language to reduce threat
- ▶ Discontinue making noise or contact



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Summary

- ▶ The animals behavioural response tells you where you need to be (turn backs or refusals indicate you are too close or too forceful –back up & release the pressure before reapproach
- ▶ Let the animals know where you are by moving in a position so they can see you
 - Working at correct angle to animals & move so they can track you
- ▶ Have good space when working animals (create it if necessary)
- ▶ If an animal/s refuse, think why from their perspective?



Is paying attention to animal handling a worth while investment?

Yes, Yes, Yes and Yes!

AFFECTS :

- ↪ **Production**
- ↪ **Safety & work environment**
- ↪ **Animal welfare**

For further information
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