

Season 2, Episode 3: Transport Losses

Dr. Matt Ritter, Cargill, and Dr. Anna Johnson, Iowa State University, review management practices and steps you can take to reduce stressors and minimize transport losses.



Definitions

Transport losses are pigs that die during the marketing process. Non-ambulatory pigs are those that cannot move or keep up with the rest of the group from unloading to stunning at the packing plant. There are two categories of non-ambulatory pigs, fatigued and injured. Fatigued pigs display physical signs of stress, such as increased respiration. Injured pigs have a structural abnormality or have sustained an injury during loading, transport, or the unloading process. Research collaboration with commercial production systems has facilitated further understanding of transport losses.

Animal welfare

[Food Safety Inspection Service](#) (FSIS), a division of USDA, has created regulations surrounding non-ambulatory pigs at packing plants. These pigs must be segregated from normal pigs during the marketing stream and cannot enter the school hot lunch programs. Animal welfare audits have become common place in packing plants as well as the farm through [Pork Quality Assurance Plus](#) (PQA) site assessment and [Common Swine Industry Audit](#).

Economic losses

There is direct economic impact on producers because of transport losses. At a value of \$100 per hundred weight, a 210-pound carcass is worth over \$200. A deceased pig is worth nothing and a non-ambulatory pig is discounted 30%, on average. FSIS requires the plant to report dead pigs at the plant, 0.2-0.25% transport losses are considered within normal range. One study, conducted over a four-year period, observed 310 million pigs going through the marketing process. Results of that study showed transport losses of 0.26% and non-ambulatory pigs at 0.63%.

Reducing stressors

There is always a human and animal element to loading, transport, and unloading. We are asking a lot of pigs during the marketing process. Being segregated, walking, navigating the shoot, getting on a trailer, transportation, and unloading at the plant are all stressors on the animal. Be cognizant about spacing out stressors as much as possible. Gentle handling which is slow, calm and utilizes paddles reduces stress on the pig when compared to aggressive handling which is rapid and uses electric prods. Transportation floor space should be considered. Provide 5 square feet per pig or 58 pounds per square foot or less. Time of year is also very important. During summer, shower pigs on the trailer prior to transport and avoid stoppage time. During winter months, board up the trailer and provide bedding. Prepare pigs for transport by walking pens daily, resorting prior to loading, and implement feed withdrawal. One study examining group size during loading showed groups of four pigs instead of eight reduced transport losses by 56% and the pigs also loaded more quickly. Remember to ensure everyone involved in pig handling is trained and knows their role.

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