

Guidance on Pigs with Hernias

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Factsheet

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A hernia is an abnormal protrusion of an organ or tissue through a defect or natural opening in the covering skin or muscle. Hernias often cause welfare problems as well as economic loss.

Umbilical hernias in pigs occur when abdominal connective tissue fails to close around the umbilical ring. The condition may be hereditary, although the majority of umbilical hernias are related to infection of the umbilical cord.

Inguinal and scrotal hernias are congenital (present at birth) and can be significantly affected by genetic and environmental factors.

WHAT PRODUCERS SHOULD DO

Legislation, both federal and provincial, dictates that animals must be handled humanely. Enforcement agencies and the courts will use accepted industry standards and the law to determine which practices are not acceptable.

Pigs with hernias should be dealt with when they are young and hernias are small. Processors prefer not to receive pigs with hernias. However, animals with small intact hernias can be transported directly to slaughter. If the size of the hernia is questionable, please refer to the points listed under the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Compromised Animal Policy.

In Ontario, there are a number of provincial slaughter plants that slaughter barbecue pigs (BBQ hogs), pigs with a dressed weight less than 45.36 kg (100 lb). Producers are encouraged to contact local provincial slaughter plants to make arrangements for slaughter. This provides producers with an outlet for the shipment of otherwise healthy pigs with small, intact hernias to these plants.

UNFIT FOR TRANSPORT

According to the *Health of Animals Act*, Health of Animals Regulations, Part XII, Transportation of Animals (Federal), it is a violation to:

- load, transport or unload animals in a manner that would cause injury or undue suffering
- crowd animals to such an extent as to cause injury or undue suffering

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Compromised Animal Policy states, DO NOT transport an animal that has a hernia that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- impedes movement (includes conditions in which the hind legs of the animal touch the hernia when the animal is walking),
- is painful on palpation; indicated by vocalization, a change in the animal's mood (aggression), behaviours by the animal directed at the painful area, escape reaction and increased respiratory rate
- touches the ground when the animal is standing in its natural position, and/or
- includes an open skin wound, ulceration or obvious infection.

Allowing hernias to grow to the point of being infected, painful or having ulcerated skin can be considered causing unnecessary suffering or permitting distress.



Figure 1. Hernias often cause welfare problems as well as economic loss.

KNOW THE LAW

Producers must be aware of the laws in Ontario regarding care, handling and transport of pigs. Specifically, the following laws apply to the care, handling and transport of pigs with hernias.

Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (OSPCA Act)

The *OSPCA Act*, Ontario's provincial animal protection legislation, prohibits an owner from permitting an animal to be in distress. The presence of distressed animals is NOT consistent with reasonable and generally acceptable animal care practices. Falling below industry-accepted animal care standards could be considered permitting distress, and may lead to enforcement action.

Distress means that an animal is in need of proper care, water, food or shelter or is injured, sick or in pain, is suffering or is abused, or is subject to undue or unnecessary hardship, privation or neglect.

OSPCA inspectors may issue orders under the *OSPCA Act* where circumstances warrant.

Food Safety and Quality Act — Ontario Regulation 31/05

Ontario's Meat Regulation (O.Reg. 31/05) allows Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF) veterinary inspectors to condemn or euthanize animals that are unfit for human consumption or that are suffering from undue suffering or distress at provincially licensed slaughter plants. Pigs that arrive at provincial slaughter plants with ulcerated or infected hernias or hernias touching the ground will be held for veterinary inspection and may be condemned or euthanized.

Ontario Regulation 105/09

Ontario's Disposal of Deadstock Regulation (O.Reg. 105/09) requires every person who has care of or control over a fallen animal to promptly destroy the animal in a humane manner or to make arrangements for it to be promptly and humanely destroyed. A fallen animal is one that is disabled by disease, emaciation or any other condition likely to cause death.

Pigs with very severe hernias that have become infected or injured may meet this definition.

The regulation also prohibits the movement of a fallen animal before it has been killed. This regulation is enforced by OMAF.

Livestock Community Sales Act

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food has the responsibility for monitoring the health and welfare of livestock at auctions in Ontario under the authority of the *Livestock Community Sales Act*.

Animals found that are diseased, injured or otherwise compromised at an auction can be ordered by OMAF veterinary inspectors to be:

- euthanized; or
- sent directly for slaughter; or
- marked and sold for slaughter only; or
- sold with a ring announcement of the condition; or
- ordered returned to the consignor for treatment.

PREVENTION OF HERNIAS

Although the occurrence of scrotal and umbilical hernias is often a frustrating concern for commercial farms, there are several areas where the producer can try to reduce the incidence of hernias:

- Good sanitation and hygiene may be more likely to reduce the incidence of umbilical hernias than eliminating certain boars or dams. Disinfecting umbilical cords has been reported to decrease the incidence of infection.
- Improving farrowing-crate sanitation by removing accumulated sow manure before farrowing and using a desiccant powder to keep the crate floor dry may reduce bacterial levels in the piglets' environment, thus reducing the risk of umbilical infection and umbilical hernias.

- Environmental factors such as abnormal stretching of the umbilical cord during farrowing, incorrect placing of navel clips or infection of the umbilical “stump” on the piglet could contribute to the failure of the umbilical cord opening to close correctly.
- In scrotal/inguinal hernias, careful pig handling can make a significant difference to herd incidence.
- As in all pig production, good stockmanship yields positive results.

WHO TO CALL

The “Should This Pig Be Loaded” decision tree and *Caring for Compromised Pigs* booklet produced by Food and Farm Care Ontario (formerly the Ontario Farm Animal Council) are guidelines to help make pig loading and transport decisions.

If you are in doubt as to how a herniated hog should be dealt with and/or have questions about the severity of a hernia, please contact your swine veterinarian.

Assessment 1 — smaller hernias



Assessment: Transport direct to slaughter. These pigs have hernias that do not touch the ground, do not impede movement and are not open or bleeding.

Assessment 2 — larger hernias



Assessment: Not suitable for transport. These hernias should have been addressed sooner. The pigs must be promptly and humanely destroyed on the farm (euthanized or slaughtered for the producers’ own consumption on the farm).

This Factsheet was authored by Penny Lawlis, Humane Standards Officer, and Mike Draper, Livestock Community Sales Act Coordinator, Woodstock, OMAF, in conjunction with Ontario Pork.



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