

## Good practice guidelines: Nose rings and clips for pigs

### **Introduction**

Applying nose rings, clips or wires is a painful and stressful procedure for the pig, and a potential health and safety hazard for staff.

The Animal Welfare (Painful Husbandry Procedures) Code of Welfare 2005 (Minimum Standard No. 1) allows for painful procedures to be performed only “where there are no other practical, economically viable, effective, less noxious alternatives to the procedure.” The Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare 2010 requires that pigs are handled at all times in a manner that minimises the risk of pain, injury or distress to the animals (Minimum Standard No.13 (a)); and that handling facilities are available to deal with pigs undergoing routine procedures (Minimum Standard No.13 (c)).

The Animal Welfare (Pigs) Code of Welfare 2010 Minimum Standard No.16 (d) states “*If nose rings, clips or wires are used they must be placed through the cartilage at the top of the snout or in the tissue separating the nostrils.*”

### **Need for nose rings or clips**

Where pigs are run outdoors, nose rings or clips are one option to attempt to maintain ground cover and thus reduce nutrient runoff and leaching. Nose ringing reduces fence breaking by sows and may help to prevent excessive pugging and/or damage to the paddock in which pigs are kept. Some District Councils require the use of nose rings, clips or wires as a condition for keeping pigs outdoors.

Nose rings or clips make digging uncomfortable for pigs, and limit rooting behaviour. When correctly applied, pigs can still eat grass and forage freely on leaf litter and surface vegetation. It is unacceptable and potentially prosecutable under the New Zealand Animal Welfare Act (1999) to use cuts or nicks to the disk of the snout by a sharp knife to discourage rooting.

Over 40% of New Zealand’s sow herd is farmed outdoors, whereas it is estimated that only (up to) 2% of New Zealand’s commercial grower pigs are farmed outdoors. For this reason, these guidelines are focused on sows, but the principles also apply to grower pigs farmed outdoors.

### **Good practice guidance for the use of nose rings and clips**

Wires are not recommended good practice and their use is discouraged. Wires take longer to apply and are more difficult to insert.

Rings or clips are recommended good practice, most importantly, inserted correctly at the time of application by trained experienced persons or under veterinary guidance.

Nose rings and clips as well as their applicators are available through Anquip or Shoof; your veterinarian, and some local farm supply stores.

**If nose rings are used** to control sows rooting in soil:

- Insert into the soft tissue separating the nostrils (the nasal septum) using the special applicator. Insert so that  $\frac{1}{3}$  is in and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the ring is out of the nose. This placement is so that the ring is not inserted too deeply and will avoid the more painful part of the septum. Turn the ring so the join and hinge are exposed.

Nose rings should NOT be used in Kunekune or brachycephalic breeds nor in young growing pigs.

**If clips are used** to control sows rooting of soil:

- Place clips through the top of the snout, around the '10-11 o'clock' position, and the '1-2 o'clock' position.

Small self-penetrating nose clips are available commercially, and are inserted in the top of the snout with a special applicator. Nose clips may be triangular shaped or round. The triangular shaped clips better conform to the snout profile and may be less likely to be ripped out.



Applicator and clips used for nose clipping sows.



Sow with self-piercing ring inserted through the soft tissue separating the nostrils.



Sow with clips inserted at the '10-11 and 1-2 o'clock' position in the top side of the snout.

### ***Assessment of numbers of rings and clips inserted***

Not only is the insertion of clips and rings a painful procedure, but the requirement for restraint is stressful for the sow (refer guidelines for restraint below). However, restraint is necessary for staff safety, and necessary for the sow so that the procedure is carried out quickly and effectively. Because clips and rings are prone to dislodge (compared to wires) farmers should offset the number inserted at any one time against the frequency with which they may be dislodged, and therefore need to be reinserted. If the ring dislodges and the soft part of the nasal septum is damaged, do not replace the ring, and use clips only instead. For these reasons, a ring and /or up to 3 -4 clips may be inserted.

## **Restraint**

Two methods are commonly used for restraining sows on-farm for application of rings and clips:

- Confine the sow in a race way or yards and using a rope with a running noose, slip the noose over the upper jaw as a snub and then securely tie the free end to a post. The sow will pull back on the rope and the operator will be then able to insert the nose ring or clips. Alternatively, one stockperson can hold the sow in a nose snare while another performs the task of ringing or clipping.
- Using a 'ringing bail', run the sow into the bail and once her head is through the opening slide the gate across to restrain her behind the ears. Once she is fixed, the operator will be then able to insert the nose ring or clips.



Photo of a bail used to confine sows for nose ringing or clipping.

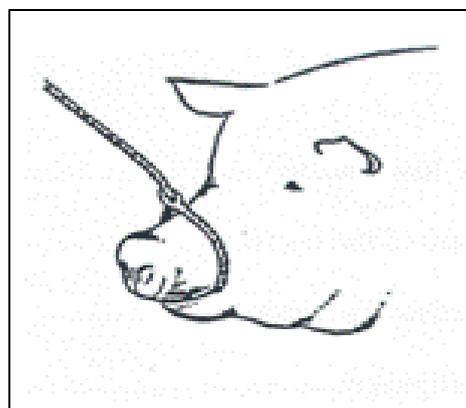


Diagram of the method to restrain a sow using a rope snare.

### **Other points to note:**

- Develop a procedure appropriate to your farm to minimise the pain and stress for the sow and to provide for staff safety throughout the procedure.
- Wear hearing protection, such as earmuffs, during the procedure.
- Insert the ring and/or clips as quickly as possible.
- The self-piercing clips are very sharp; take care to avoid injury to yourself and to sows.
- Ensure there are no protruding bolts or barbed wire that sows can catch the ring on.
- Nipple drinkers can also catch rings. Use water troughs for rung sows.
- Ensure sows can still use ad lib feeders with ease, or use feeders that sows don't need to push with their noses.