

Control of feral pigs



In Queensland, feral pigs (*sus scrofa*) are declared Class 2 animals under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* and their control is the responsibility of every landholder.

Feral pigs are difficult to control for a number of reasons.

- They are nocturnal animals, camping through the day in mainly inaccessible vegetation where vehicle access is often impossible.
- Pigs have a relatively short gestation period and produce a large number of offspring, so repeated control programs must be conducted before any sustained population reduction is achieved.
- They are omnivores: a species that eats both plants and animals as their primary food source, which makes successful pre-feeding difficult.
- Their home ranges are large—between 2 and 50 km²; thus, control programs need to be conducted over a wide area (often including several properties) to be effective.

For more information on feral pig distribution, ecology and impact see the fact sheet *Feral pigs in Queensland*.

How to develop a pig control strategy

The strategic management of feral pigs is aimed at minimising the damage they cause to primary production and conservation areas.

Strategic management involves four key components:

Defining the problem—first, you need to define the true impact of feral pigs on the valued resource. This sets a justifiable cost of control.

Management plan—next, it is important to determine the best combination of control methods for your control program. Often the most effective approach is to coordinate on a local and regional level.

Implementation—actions often involve the cooperation with neighbouring land managers, both private and public.

Monitoring and evaluation—monitoring determines the cost-effectiveness of each control method and the overall efficiency of the strategy. Evaluation establishes if and how management should be changed.



Trapping

Trapping is an important technique that is most useful in populated areas, on smaller properties (<5000 ha), and where there are low pig numbers. Trapping can be useful in 'mopping up' survivors from poisoning programs. It is most successful when food resources are limited.

Trigger mechanisms for pig traps can be made pig-specific and therefore pose little danger to other wild or domestic animals.

Advantages

- This is the safest form of control and can be safely undertaken on closely populated areas.
- Flexible and can be incorporated into routine property activities, making economical use of labour and materials.
- Carcasses can be safely disposed of.
- Traps can be moved and re-used; good trapping makes use of opportunities as they arise.
- Cost of traps can be offset by selling trapped pigs.
- Normal pig behaviour is not altered, which allows a greater number of the total population in an area to be removed.
- More humane to pigs and non-target species.

Disadvantages

- Can be time consuming and expensive to construct and maintain.
- Must be checked regularly.
- Not practical for large-scale control.
- Some pigs are trap shy.

Tips

- Stop all activities that will disturb normal feeding (i.e. do not undertake any shooting or dogging).
- Free feeding prior to activating traps is an essential part of successful trapping.
- Feeding sites should be placed where feral pigs are active (i.e. water points, holes in fences, areas containing old carcasses on which pigs have been feeding).
- Bait for traps must be food that pigs usually eat in that area. Pigs feeding on one crop (e.g. sugarcane) will often not take to alternative foods. However, new baits are sometimes attractive (e.g. fermented grains).
- The trap can be built around the feeding site, with feeding within the trap undertaken for several nights before it is set.
- Set the trap every night and check each day. If the trap cannot be checked daily then shade and water must be provided.

- Continue to trap until no more pigs are caught. A change of bait can be tried. Again, feed for one or two nights before re-setting the trap.
- Traps may be left permanently in locations used by pigs and can be pre-baited and activated when fresh signs of pigs appear.
- If the trap is to be moved, start feeding at the new site before re-locating the trap.

Design

There are several trap designs but all are principally an enclosed area with one-way gates (see Figure 1).

The main area of the trap can be any shape and be made from materials on the property. The best material is steel mesh with a grid 100 × 100 mm, with a minimum height of at least 1.5 m. Star pickets need to be placed no more than 1.5 m apart and imbedded far enough to ensure that adult pigs cannot push them over or lift them up out of the ground.

Alternative trap entrances

Funnel entrance

Formed by the two ends of the mesh forming a funnel, the ends are tied together at the top with wire or rope. The pig moves through the funnel forcing the bottom of the mesh ends apart and once it is in the trap the ends spring back together (see Figure 2).

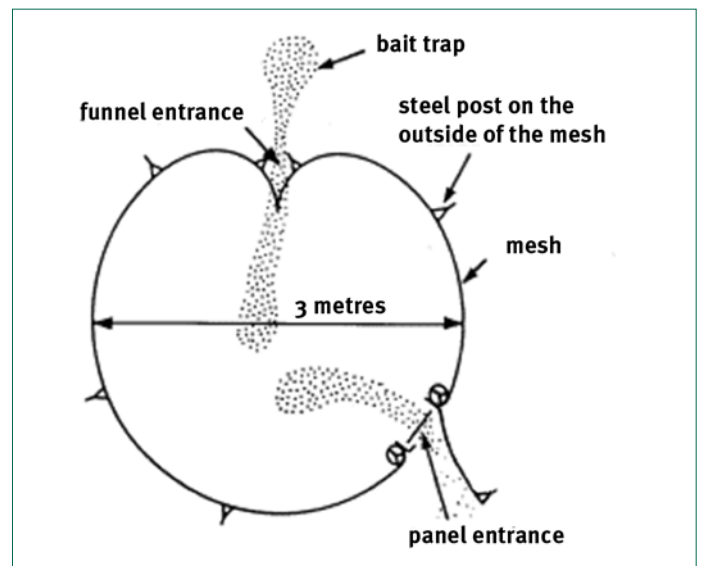


Figure 1. Alternative entrances

Tripped gate entrance

A side-hinged gate is pulled shut by springs and is held open by many systems that can be triggered to allow the gate to swing shut. Often trip wires are used, but many other systems have been tried. Most of these systems are not selective for feral pigs and can be triggered by any animal attracted to the bait. Once triggered the trap is no longer effective in trapping pigs.

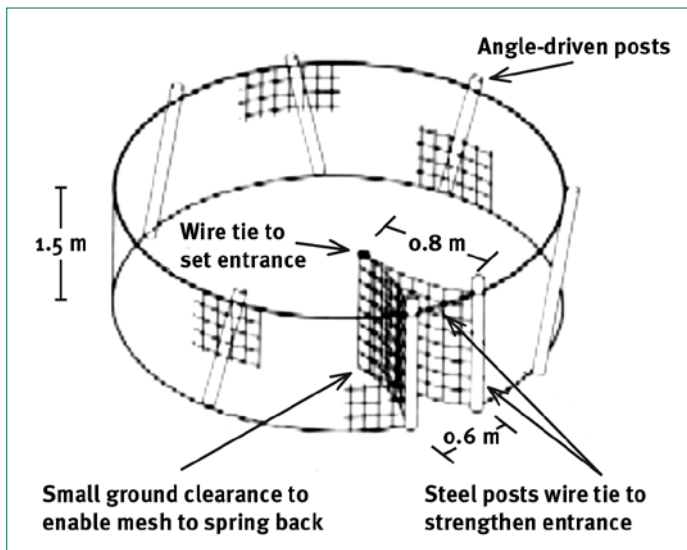


Figure 2. Silo trap with funnel entrance (14 m of silo mesh diameter about 4.5 m)

Pig-specific trigger

By far the simplest and most effective trigger system has the gate held open by a bar (often a branch or piece of wood) which is hooked over the wire on the gate and on the side panel (see Figure 3).

Pigs rooting for feed in the trap lift the bar allowing the gate to swing shut. The specific feeding habit of pigs insures they are the only animals that lift the trigger bar.

The gate may be latched to prevent pigs from opening the door once triggered. However, this will prevent more pigs pushing their way in to join those inside.

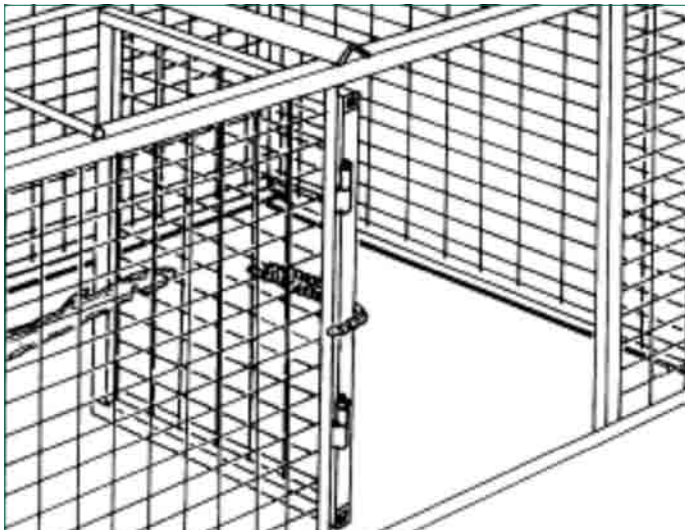


Figure 3a. Pig-specific trigger

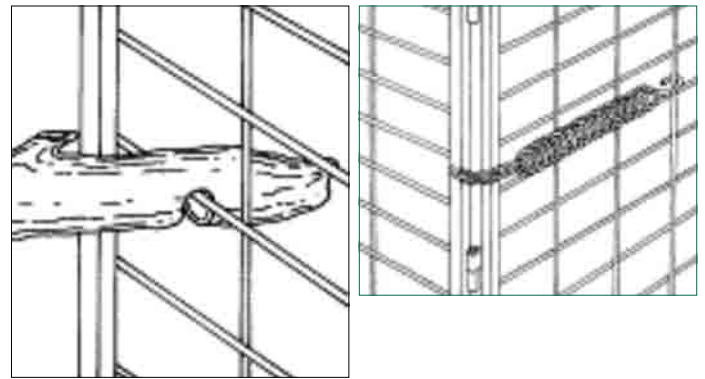


Figure 3b. Close up of pig-specific trigger

Poisoning

Poisoning is the most effective control method available that can quickly reduce a pig population.

Sodium fluoroacetate (1080) is recommended, but can only be supplied through persons authorised under the Health Act. Your local land protection officer or your local government office should be able to assist you.

Phosphorus-based poisons are available, but are not recommended as they are inhumane, less effective than 1080, and can result in poisoning of non-target species.

Pre-feeding is the most important step in poisoning operations. Free feeding with non-poisoned bait should be performed for several days prior to laying poisoned baits.

By selecting bait wisely, landholders can be species-selective in their poisoning program and avoid many of the unintentional effects of secondary poisoning.

Bait material such as fermented grains are very attractive to pigs but not to other animals, while it is a good idea to establish a free feeding routine so that pigs are the only animals feeding—they keep other non-targets away from the feeding site. Note that feral pigs are one of the few animals that will dig up bait.

Shooting and the use of dogs

Shooting pigs by helicopter is effective in inaccessible areas where pigs exist in reasonable numbers and are observable from the air.

The weapons recommended are shotguns with ‘buckshot’ (SG) cartridges and high-powered .308 rifles with a bullet weight in excess of 150 grains, preferably hollow point or soft point projectiles.

Ground shooting is not effective in reducing the pig population unless intense shooting is undertaken on a small, isolated and accessible population of pigs.

Dogs may be used to remove the few remaining pigs left after poisoning and trapping campaigns. Dogs are able to locate and flush pigs out of areas of thick cover.

Do not use dogs or shoot in areas before or during poisoning or trapping operations.

Fencing

Though an expensive option, fencing can offer successful pig control. Research has indicated that the most successful pig-proof fences are also the most expensive.

The most effective pig-proof fences use fabricated sheep mesh held close to the ground by plain or barbed wire and supported on steel posts.

Electrifying a conventional fence greatly improves its effectiveness if used before pigs have established a path through the fence.

Pigs will often charge an electric fence and unless the fence incorporates fabricated netting they often successfully breach the fence.

For crop protection or to avoid lamb predation, pig-proof fences need to be constructed *before* the pigs become a problem. Once pigs have adjusted to feeding on grain or lambs in a particular paddock fencing may be ineffective.

Diseases and parasites carried by pigs

Feral pigs are known to carry many diseases that can infect other livestock and be transmitted to humans.

Diseases most likely to affect people are:

- sparganosis—a parasite that can infest the muscles
- leptospirosis—a serious illness which causes very high temperatures, kidney problems and jaundice
- Q fever—a disease that can cause very high temperature and result in severe heart problems.

Q fever and leptospirosis have symptoms similar to Ross River fever, and can be contracted from contact with blood, meat and urine through broken skin, intake of urine-contaminated food or water, and inhalation of infectious air-borne organisms. Both can be fatal.

It is advisable to avoid handling feral pigs unless they are slaughtered at licensed premises where there is a full-time meat inspector on duty to ensure that animals are free of the above diseases.

Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland (call 13 25 23 or visit our website at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au).

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