



## **Benchmarking On-farm Benefits of Adoption of ProHand Principles**

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Rural Solutions SA

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ProHand Pigs, a Professional Pig Handling Training Program for Stockpeople, aims to improve the key attitudes and behaviours of stockpeople that influence pig behaviour, productivity and welfare. The program has been available to industry for well over ten years, but its content was most recently revised in 2008/09, with the new version being made available by Australian Pork Ltd for national delivery by trained facilitators since March 2009. Between April 2009 and February 2010 ProHand facilitators Graeme Pope, SA and Dr Barb Frey, WA have delivered ProHand training to approximately 190 stockpeople across those two states.

Past research in the Australian pig industry conducted by Professors Paul Hemsworth and Grahame Coleman (Animal Welfare Science Centre), Victoria, to examine the potential on-farm benefits through application of ProHand pig handling principles, has previously shown a reduction in fear responses in pigs, resulting in improvements in reproduction and growth performance, ease of handling and welfare outcomes. These benefits are highlighted within the ProHand training program to provide stockpeople with good production reasons for on-farm adoption of routine “positive” pig handling behaviours.

During Day #2 sessions of ProHand, trainees are encouraged by their course facilitator to share their experiences in recognising any change/s they have observed in either their pigs, or in farm staff attitudes and/or behaviour, since completion of Day #1 approximately four weeks earlier.

The main objective of this project was to capture this feedback through a process of formal questioning via a personal questionnaire, to enable the results to be used by ProHand facilitators during future courses to help demonstrate the benefits of ProHand training and on-farm adoption.

A questionnaire with five questions requiring either a “tick-the-box” style response or a written opinion, was designed and circulated to approximately 190 stockpeople in SA and WA who had completed both Day #1 & #2 sessions of ProHand training since April 2009. Eighty one completed responses were received that were suitable for results analysis and interpretation.

The majority of respondents strongly believed they had improved their routine pig handling techniques and reduced the incidence of routine “negative” handling since completing ProHand training. A lesser majority believed their pigs were easier to work with and their working conditions had improved (“Less physical effort is now required to complete pig handling tasks”) since adoption of ProHand pig handling principles.

The results of this project confirm that delivery of the ProHand training program in its current format, when coupled with the routine on-farm implementation of more frequent “positive” pig handling principles, will result in measurable change in stockperson attitudes and behaviours, and an improved animal welfare outcome.