

Bringing Them Home, But Not For Bacon

Joint effort saves Iowa farm pigs from Midwest flooding

BY JAMES HETTINGER

In the course of saving dozens of dehydrated, malnourished, and severely sunburned Iowa pigs stranded on a Mississippi River levee by flooding, rescuers found they had to move beyond the initial rescue plan.

Way beyond.

“We jokingly said by the end of the operation we were on Plan 76,” says Dick Green of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), director of operations for the rescue, which was facilitated by IFAW, Farm Sanctuary, the American Humane Association, and the Animal Rescue League of Boston. “And even [with] Plan 76, which was our last plan, I think we were on Version D.”

The size and complexity of the water-and-land operation made it particularly challenging for the team of about 25 rescuers who worked 16- to 18-hour days for about a week in Iowa. The flooding, which began in mid-June, killed hundreds of pigs and left survivors scattered along the nearly 20-mile “Big Ditch” levee and areas in and around Oakville, Iowa.

“We had some incredible logistical challenges,” says Julie Janovsky, director of campaigns for Farm Sanctuary, who handled logistics and assisted with rescues on the ground. “We basically had



Emergency personnel from four animal welfare organizations joined forces in June to rescue 68 Iowa pigs from a flood that left many stranded atop a levee. The survivors included a mom with seven piglets.

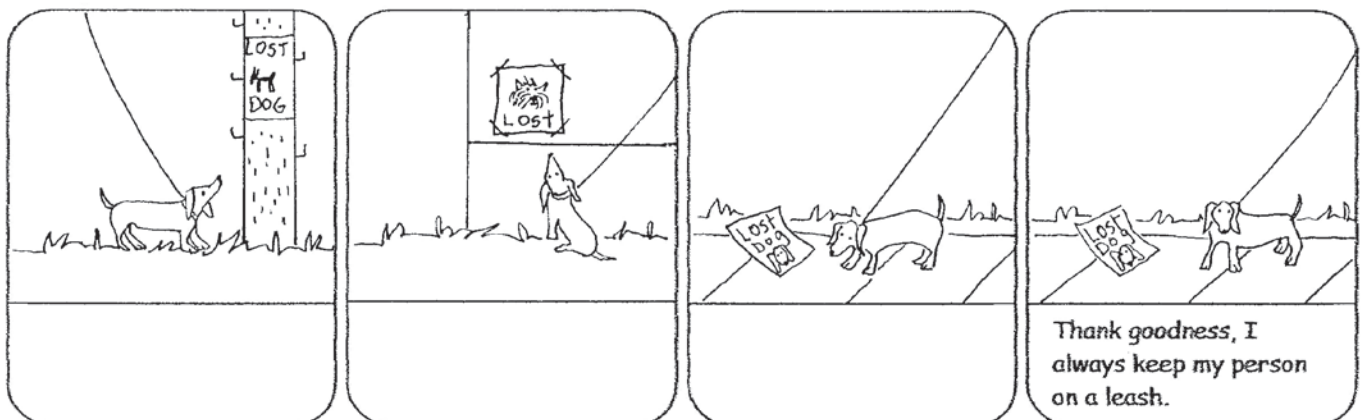
to seek and find whatever pigs were out there, and they could be anywhere from mile zero to mile 20 of a levee that was surrounded by water.”

Green, IFAW’s disaster relief manager and a veteran of more than 100 disaster response efforts, calls the Iowa pig rescue “by far the most challenging” of his career from a planning standpoint.

The initial plan was to herd the pigs off the levee, but rescuers quickly discovered the pigs didn’t have the strength to walk that far. A second idea called for removing them by barge, but as the water receded rescuers couldn’t get deep enough water access.

The plan that finally clicked involved acquiring a tractor and a hog pen, mov-

Dog Park



By J & J Hubal



Rescuers herd pigs into a trailer near Oakville, Iowa, after flooding forced the animals to survive in the wild for nearly two weeks. Pictured from left are Mike Brammer of the Animal Rescue League of Boston, Julie Janovsky of Farm Sanctuary, Terry Donaldson of the American Humane Association (AHA), Nick Gilman of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and Manny Maciel of the AHA.

ing the pigs into five containment areas where food, water, and shade were provided, and then funneling them into the trailer to be carted away. Eventually, 68 pigs—including several pregnant sows—were transported to the Farm Sanctuary facility in Watkins Glen, N.Y., where they awaited new adoptive homes.

As of mid-July, Janovsky was expecting the adoption process to take six months. All of the pigs had been raised

on factory farms, but farmers relinquished them to Farm Sanctuary via the Iowa department of agriculture.

The rescuers' experiences ranged from gruesome to life-affirming. Unaccustomed to being outside, the pigs on the levee had no protection from the sun and suffered third-degree burns on their backs and ears. Their tails—which had been docked by producers—couldn't shoo away flies. "You would just see that their tails—the stump that they had—would be just completely third-degree-burned and bloodied by flies," Janovsky recalls. "It was pretty rough."

But Janovsky also found a mom with seven piglets in a forested area. When the rescued sow later saw Janovsky at the Farm Sanctuary facility, she apparently recognized her, started oinking and walked over to her. Janovsky says the rescued pigs have "greater personal-

ity" than any animals she has previously encountered.

By helping get the animals to safety, the team members also helped thwart the potential formation of a herd of feral hogs who could have spread disease to other populations. "Sixty-eight feral pigs is never gonna be a good situation," says Mark Vogel, a senior rescue technician with the Animal Rescue League of Boston.

The rescue operation proved to be an emotional roller coaster, Janovsky says, where rescuers went from finding a barn full of drowned animals to discovering some who could be saved. "For someone who works on policy, as I do, most of my work is with the computer," she says. "So to actually go out there and to physically take animals out of a horrific situation and bring them to a sanctuary, it's extremely rewarding."

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