

This little piggie went to market.....

The vast majority of our members are kind, conscientious and caring farmers dedicated to doing the very best for their animals that they are able. Some people on the facebook page have asked some very good questions about loading their pigs for market with less stress for both the animal and themselves.

My husband is actually not much of a livestock person but he is a genius at putting my "hare-brained ideas" into a real and workable way to do things. Such is the case with our loading system. Bear in mind that this works for us. Feel free to use it as a guide but tweak it to your situation and circumstances. It works very well for us though.

There are quite a few reasons that you would want to make things go as easily as you can. The safety of both you and your animals is foremost. Pigs may be shorter than we are but they are much stronger and no matter how tame they are in general terms, when stressed, angry, pushed or afraid they can push you around, toss you like a beach ball and even cause lifetime injuries to the person trying to load them. ALWAYS keep this in mind!

Meat quality is also a consideration. It has been proven time and time again that meat coming from stressed or injured animals is much lower in quality than meat that comes from a more relaxed animal. It is only smart to make sure that your customers get the best, most consistent quality of meat that you can provide. Have you ever paid for a meal that looked great, had fantastic reviews and turned out to be less than tasty.....how soon are you going back to spend more hard earned money at that place? Your customers feel the same way. Just remember, if you brag up your Red Wattle pork, it had better be worth bragging about! or you will have a hard time getting a premium price for your pork.

The last reason that I will mention here is the fact that if you raise an animal and butcher an animal, you have a moral obligation to see to it that the animal lives a life that is as close to its unique and natural traits as you can provide. That obligation extends to the end of their life. You owe it to them to make sure that you provide the most humane end that you can. This includes checking out your processor. Make sure that he allows the animals to rest at least 2 hours in order to recover from the stress of moving. Make sure that they do not use shock sticks. They will only add to the stress the animal is under and they have a tendency to be used in haste when a slower more deliberate effort will do the trick.

Head 'em up.....move 'em out!

Our loading system is a system that has evolved over the years and would be even better if we had the money to do it as Temple Grandin suggests. Temple, for those of you who haven't heard of her, is a College Professor and animal behaviorist that specializes in and is well sought out for her thoughts in designing systems used by large processing plants, holding facilities etc....yeah, the BIG guys! She knows of what she speaks. While our system isn't exactly what she would suggest, it is built on much of what she suggests....the ideal costs far more than we can afford.

There are certain things that I would insist on having in my design. They are not costly and are well worth making sure that you design around them. First would be making sure that the

beginning of your chute is straight for the first 3 to 4 body lengths and at least 34" wide. Don't go any longer than that. Animals tend to follow the leader and this gives them a chance for the front animal to go in so far without seeing a "wall" and the rest to follow her. The chute should then curve but not allow them to turn around. It is a natural instinct to want to turn and if you have a curve you will welcome that instinct and still move forward in the ramp. Ideally the chute would have solid walls but that is pretty cost prohibitive for us so we use cattle panels (hog panels are too short for a frightened hog) and compensate with time, patience and practice. Practice comes from letting them explore the chute for a couple of days before loading.

Second on my list is lighting. Animals will be hesitant if there are shadows ahead or big variations in lighting. Remember, this is all new to them and while you are not pushing them, they are well aware that something is going on. Moving of people, chains, tarps etc will cause them to either hesitate, or try to turn around. They also don't like a big breeze blowing in their faces as they are trying to move. Minimize scary things and they will be less afraid. Pigs that are more relaxed are easier to move. Makes sense doesn't it?

Make some sorting boards out of solid plywood. Pigs will not go where they can't see but if they detect even a sliver of light they will move hell and high water to get to the other side. This means that the board needs to be big enough to go from the very dirt to above their heads and wide enough that they do not see the edge as a mere obstacle to go around. When you follow your pigs, remember that their turning point is the shoulder. This means that if you want them to go forward, you follow behind the point of the shoulder...no one ahead of them at this point or they will turn. If you want them to turn, go to the shoulder on the opposite side of the direction that you want them to go. Move slowly and deliberately keeping noise to a minimum. Talk to them softly but if you start to get stressed, don't talk. This is the part that my mostly genius husband has a very hard time with but you have to keep in mind that you don't speak pig and they don't understand English....and assorted "french" words are not helpful. They are already on high alert no need to give them more of a reason to be upset.

The illustration that I have included shows our set up. It isn't perfect but it works for our situation. We have to load pigs, sheep, goats and Highland cattle (horned) and therefore have tried to keep all of those animals in mind when designing. It allows us to put our entire group into the first area and then to slowly weed them out of the group, keeping only the ones going to freezer camp in the loading process.

The second illustration is of our loading chute. I am particularly proud of the job my husband did in designing this. It is adjustable and can be used to load into a low trailer (almost ground level, a step up trailer, and into the back of a pick up truck! He made it all out of stuff from our "someday we are gonna need this" pile. When you build your ramp, keep these things in mind. If it is slippery, they will not go. Make sure that, while your flooring is very solid (no give at all) and no more than 34" wide it has cleats that are no more than 8" apart. This will keep slipping to a minimum, especially if the animal isn't panicking. You will also use these cleats to steady a follow board behind them as they go up the chute. It will help to have a light in the trailer. You can utilize natural light during the day by opening doors (put a follow board up to block exit), orientation of the trailer to make the most of natural light or one of those plug in lights shining into the trailer. Pigs don't see well and they don't like the idea of walking into a cave although adding treats and water in the trailer does help. When building your chute you

also need to remember that the steeper the incline, the higher the heart rate of the pig being loaded. Make it as long as you can while balancing the storage available for the chute when you are not using it and the maneuverability of the chute to get it from storage to the area you need it. Last tip....I have put our chute to the loading area for several days before we needed it and opened it up to the pigs to explore. Keeping feed and treats in the trailer will let them know that good things happen to those who get there first. Watermelon and cucumbers are very enticing in the summer! This really helps them get used to it and it takes the scare factor out of it for the most part.

This works for us. Change it up to make it work for you. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I'm always happy to answer questions.

PHOTO ONE:

This shows a picture of how our adjustable ramp is put together. My genius husband designed it so that the actual axel will rotate the ramp from ground level to one that will accommodate a pick up truck.

The bottom of picture (#1) is a diagram of how the rotating axel fits onto the ramp. The long bar (picture #2) is the iron bar that does the actual rotation of the axel (please be advised that this is HEAVY and can come back to bite you so be careful....don't ask my how I know) Physics dictates that the longer the bar, the easier it will be to rotate the axel.

Picture #3 shows you where to bolt the axel. Try to get it as close to the middle as you can. This will make it easier to adjust the ramp, maneuver the ramp into position and back into storage.

Picture #4 is the pipe that we used to adjust the end of the ramp that would face the vehicle being loaded. Take the pin out, adjust the floor of the ramp so that the animals can move into the vehicle or trailer without having to take a step up or down. The picture doesn't show it but there is one of these posts on either side and each side is adjustable so that you can accommodate small dips in the ground and maintain a sturdy ramp. If it wobbles at all, they will balk.

We also put a trailer hitch on the end opposite the adjustable posts so that we can move it with the tractor or by hand. The diagram doesn't show this so use your imaginations and just pretend that it is there.

PHOTO TWO:

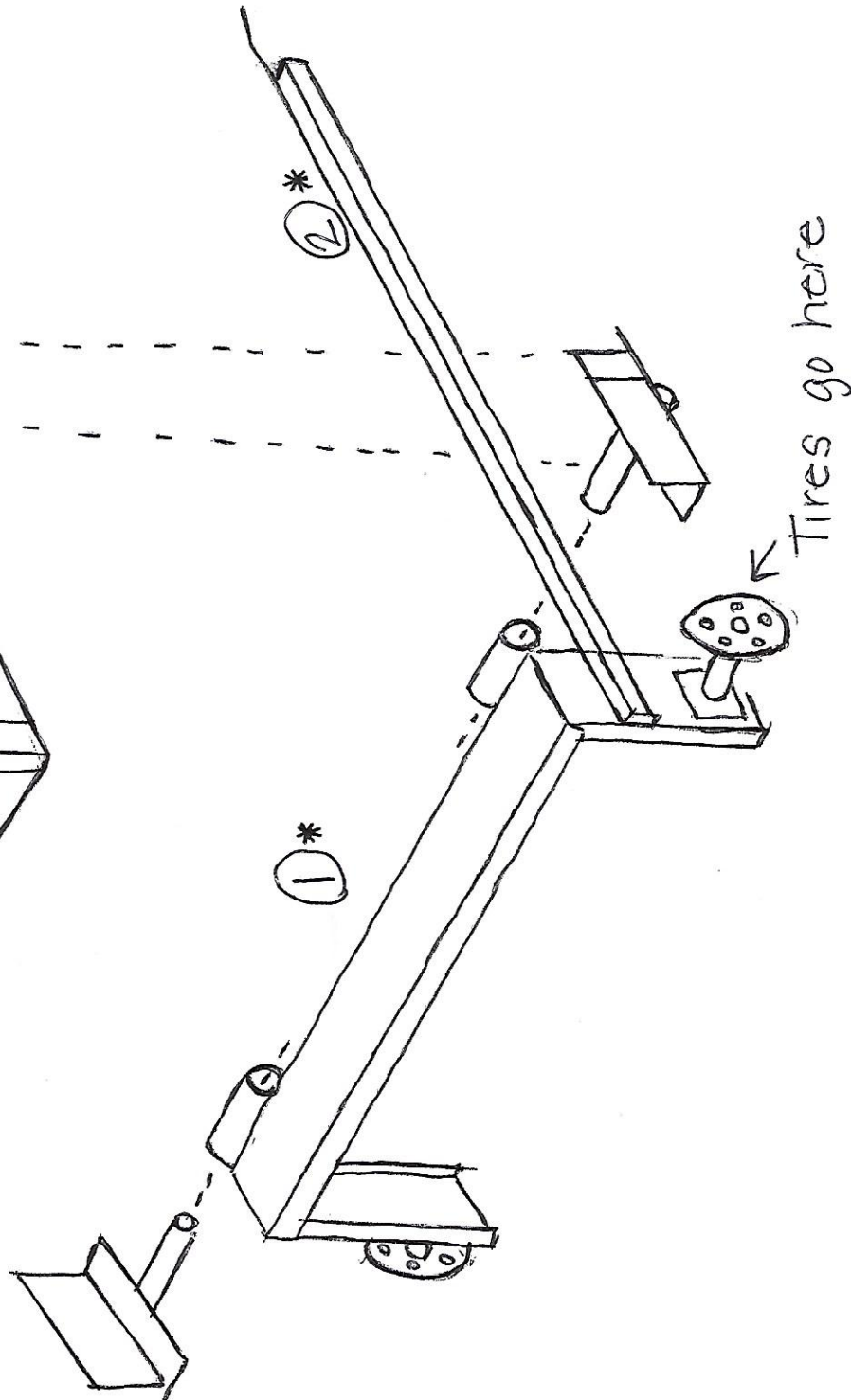
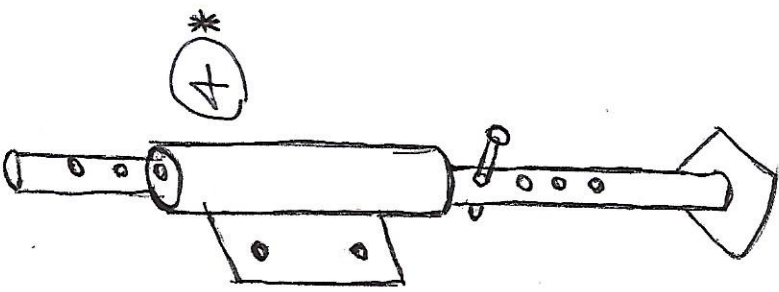
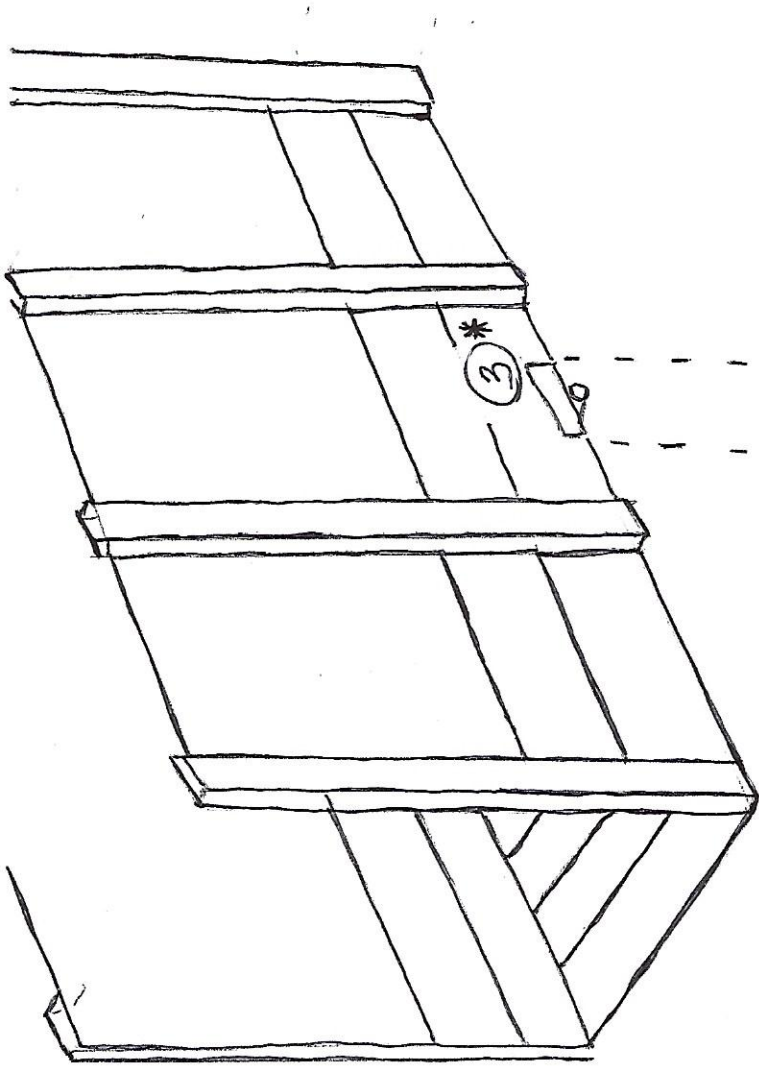
This is a blow up of the way that Mr. Genius made our axel rotate. He used scrap iron out of our "someday this will come in handy" pile so we didn't have to purchase anything. He did say that a good alternative would be to by-pass this and to make the actual floor of the ramp move by drilling holes into the sides of the walls of the ramp and inserting an iron rod beneath the floor of the ramp to raise and lower the floor itself rather than the whole ramp itself. There is no diagram of this because he was tired, didn't want to draw one and didn't think that I could make enough chocolate chip cookies to make it happen so once again, please feel free to use your imaginations.

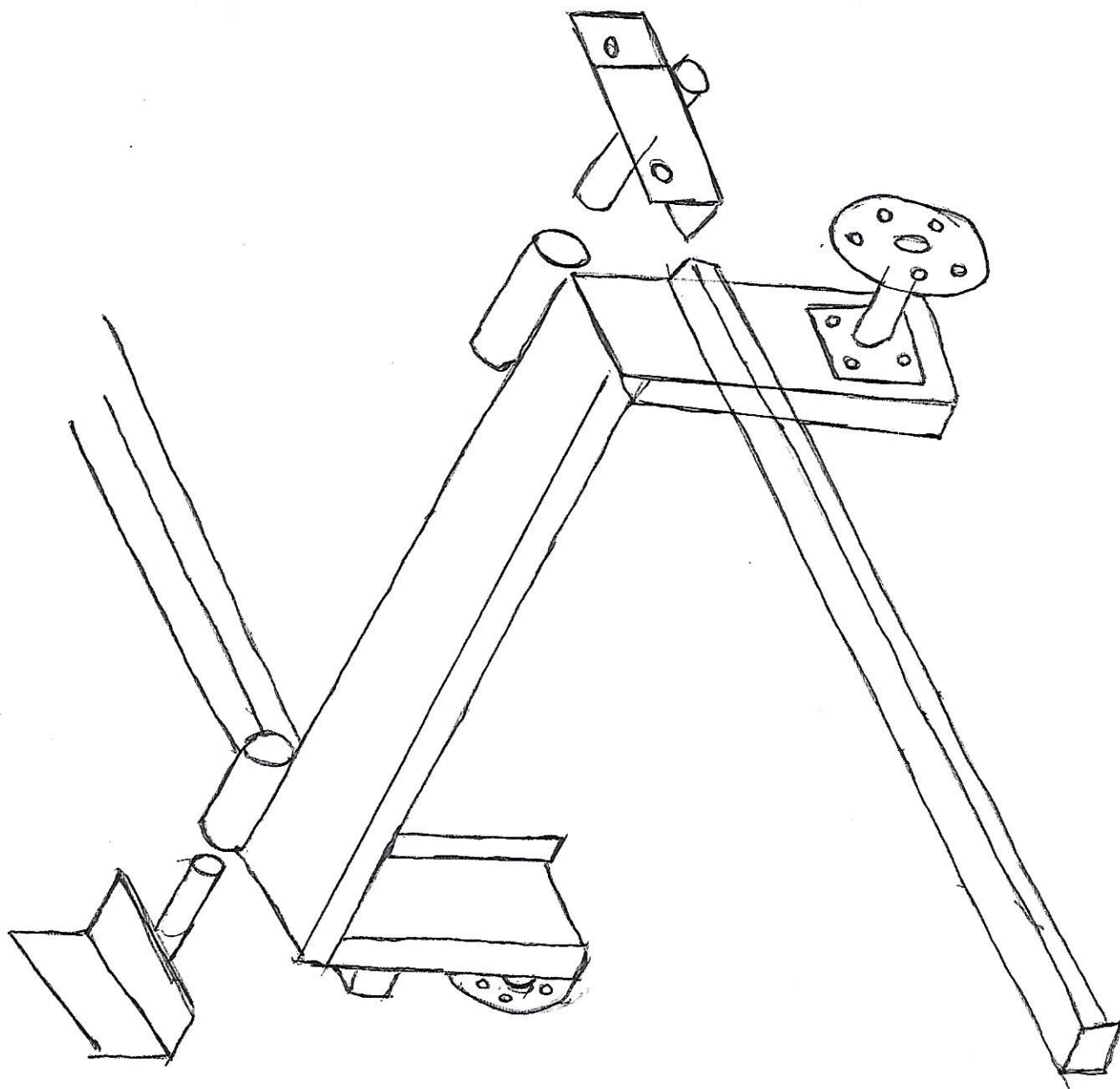
PHOTO THREE:

This is how the ramp goes together and the dotted line on the one side of the iron bar shows where the bar starts. The solid lined bar shows where it ends up after you rotate the bar from one side to the other to turn the hinge of the axel to raise and lower the ramp.

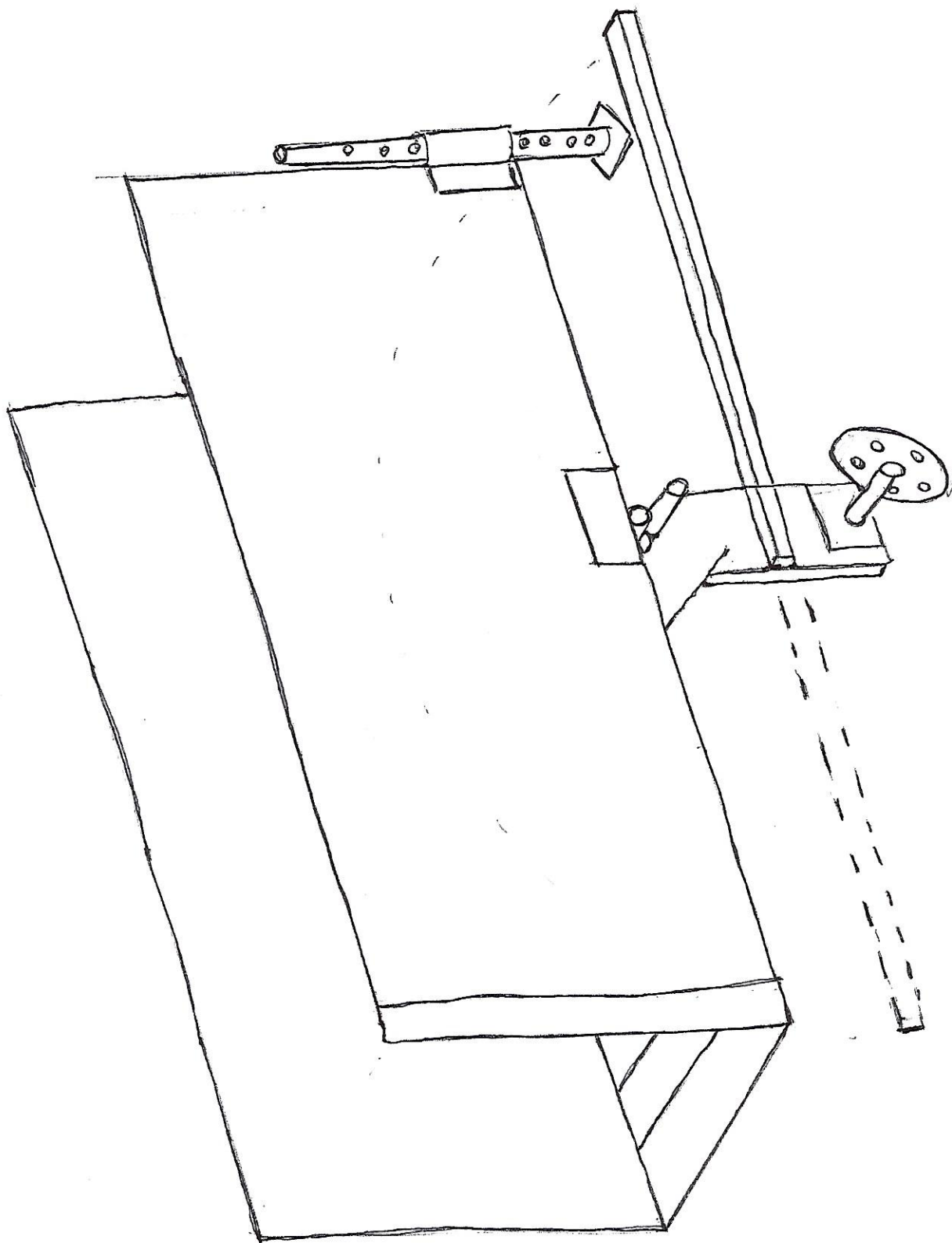
Sure hope this makes sense to you all. Feel free to contact me for more information if you need it! Happy to help if I can and even happier to bake Mr. Genius more cookies if you need more technical advice!

①





2



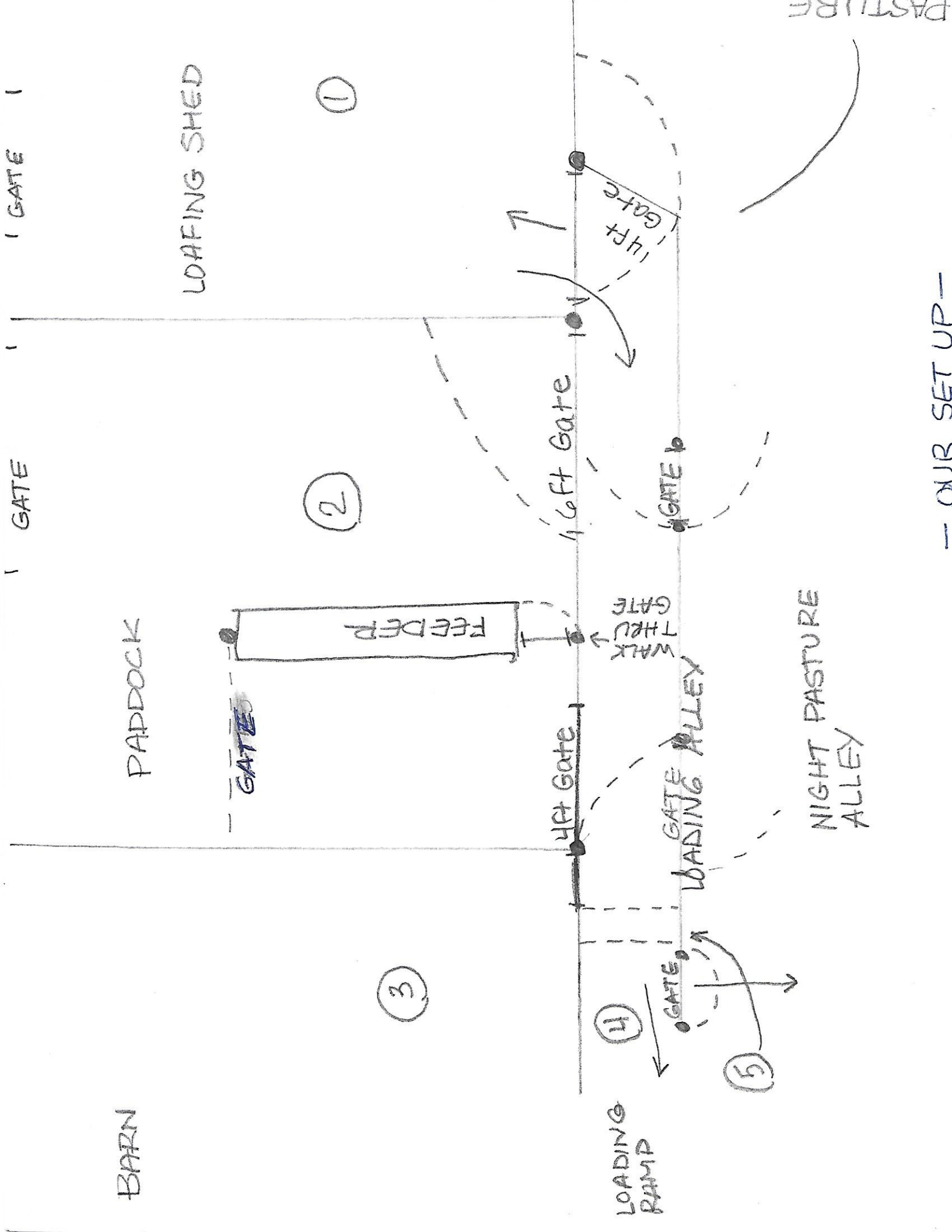
3

A hand-drawn diagram of a horse farm layout. At the top left is a rectangular area labeled "PASTURE". To its right is a "Holding pen for 5 animals". Further right is a "sm animal headgate" and a "swing gate". Below the "Holding pen" is a "sliding gate". To the right of the "Holding pen" is a large rectangular area labeled "PASTURE HOLDING (Regular Gate)". Below this is a "lg animal head gate" and a "slider gate". To the left of the "PASTURE HOLDING" area is a "sliding gate" and a note "or sliding gate for sm animals". Below the "PASTURE HOLDING" area is a "slider gate". At the bottom is a circular area with several "swing gates" and a "sliding gate". The text "Close to Ideal" is written in the center. The text "A horse gate" is written at the bottom left.

● - fence posts

Gates and curves to prevent bunching, balking & panic
Sides should be solid from the ground to just above eye height.

All gates should have a full, solid wall so people can be hidden.



— OUR SET UP —