

Using Sentinel Pigs To Check Swine Flu

Periodic monitoring of a few in-herd "sentinel" pigs can alert the practicing veterinarian to influenza-like illness before the occurrence of losses in young pigs.

Supportive treatment that may prevent death losses in young pigs should be initiated as soon as symptoms such as coughing and labored breathing are noticed, microbiologist Eugene C. Pirtle of USDA's Agricultural Research Service points out. Swine influenza is not always

readily differentiated from other diseases by outward signs. But infected animals can be identified by laboratory tests.

Swine influenza, commonly known as hog "flu," strikes suddenly, usually occurs in fall and winter, normally involves all of the susceptible animals within a herd, and subsides after a few days. The illness causes weight loss, reduced gains, and occasionally death. No effective preventive measures are available.

Collecting blood samples

for antibody tests and obtaining nasal swabs periodically on all animals would be impractical in herds of several hundred to several thousand pigs. Since an entire herd is usually affected, Dr. Pirtle evaluated the use of representative, or "sentinel" pigs in surveillance for influenza-like illness.

Dr. Pirtle, stationed at the National Animal Disease Center, Ames, Iowa, conducted the study in five Iowa feeder herds with a total of about 7,000 pigs. Veterinarians in large-animal practice assisted him in locating herds in which signs of swine influenza had not been reported in the fall months before the study.

On the first visit to each farm, Dr. Pirtle obtained nasal swabs for isolation of swine influenza virus, as well as blood samples for use in hemmagglutination-inhibition tests from each of 20 "sentinel" pigs. Dr. Pirtle took second blood samples from six of the "sentinel" pigs in each herd for hemmagglutination-inhibition tests 3 weeks later if the virus was isolated, or 6 weeks later if it was not. The hemmagglutination-inhibition test detects specific antibodies to the virus within 2 to 3 weeks after initial infection.

Dr. Pirtle chose "sentinel" pigs weighing 50 to 60 pounds, or 9 to 10 weeks old, because they should no longer be protected by antibody passively acquired from the sows. These pigs should be susceptible to infection and are likely to remain in the herd until they reach market weight.

Typical signs of swine influenza were seen in Herds

1 and 2 after these herds were selected for surveillance, but approximately 48 hours before the first scheduled visit. Diagnosis was confirmed directly by virus isolation and indirectly by a rise in specific antibody between the first and second visits.

Tests made after the first visit to Herd 3 indicated that it had previously been infected, even though signs of illness were not reported. Antibody was detected although the virus was not isolated. Antibody was still

present in low levels in serum samples collected 6 weeks later.

Herds 4 and 5 showed no signs of illness during the 6-week surveillance, virus was not isolated, nor were measurable levels of an-

tibody detected. Had either of these herds become infected with the virus in the first 4 weeks of surveillance, Dr. Pirtle says that specific antibody should have been detected in blood samples taken at the second visit.

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Mt. Joy Cooking Club

The Mt. Joy 4-H Cooking Club met recently at the St. Marks Church of God. Officers elected were: Jan Breneman, president; Robin Bricker, vice-president; Penny Sumpman, treasurer; Cindy Peifer, song leader and Loei Jo Grubb, game leader.

Leaders of the club are Mary Sweigart and Nancy Helm.

Beverly Kreider
News Reporter



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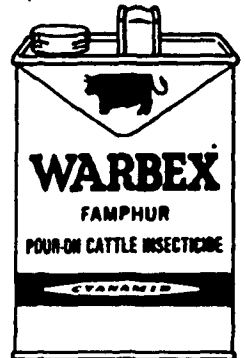


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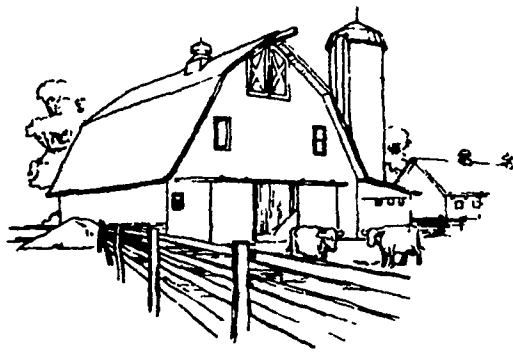


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