

MEDICINE AND MANAGEMENT

By CARL TROOP, VMD



Erysipelas can cut hog profits

Erysipelas is a disease that will affect many species of animals, including man. Swine, however, are the animals affected from an economical standpoint. Pinpointing erysipelas can be a very difficult problem as it can be a very complicated and unpredictable syndrome.

Erysipelas is produced by a bacteria called Erysipelothrix and is passed from animal to animal. Inoculation or contact, however, does not always produce the disease. Stress often appears to be an additional factor. Whenever there is an infected animal or carrier, the organism is excreted in the feces and urine and is highly infective for other animals. The most susceptible age is three months to one year. Adults also may suffer from a systemic infection.

The problem in diagnosing erysipelas is because it exhibits more than one clinical form. The pig can appear suddenly ill with increased temperature, toxic, depressed and no

appetite in the acute form. The appearance of bright red areas on the skin is often associated with this form. These areas then subsequently darken and recede, occasionally resulting in gangrene at the tip of the tail, snout or ears.

In the skin form the skin lesions become raised, often with a pale center. There still may be a raised temperature, depression, and lack of appetite. Usually the general condition improves with the skin lesions remaining for awhile.

The animal may partially improve or recover and go on to the chronic form. It may appear normal on the surface but it will not eat well, be unthrifty, and general growth retarded.

In the chronic form the heart valve may become the principle site of infections producing a malfunctioning heart, a murmur resulting in cyanosis and respiratory distress (difficult breathing). Following that there may be additional periods of fever and relapses leading to death.

If the pig survives the chronic form the infection has probably produced changes in the joints and muscles. The animal may have swollen hocks, show pain upon pressure and appear quite lame.

The erysipelas organism is very susceptible to penicillin which is the treatment of choice. However if the heart or joints or muscles have already been affected it is almost impossible to cure. Tetracyclines can also be

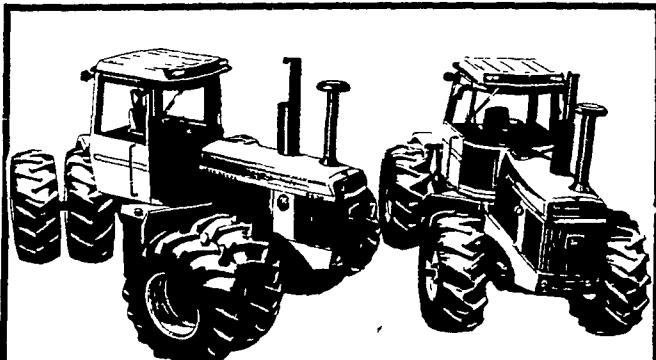
effective with the advantage that they can be added to the feed or water. Obviously sick pigs should be isolated from the rest of the herd to prevent spread of infection as much as possible.

As with most infectious diseases of animals, prevention is the most important and economical method of control. The purchase of clean breeding stock is essential. There is no means of effective testing, but one can pretty well rely on the herd history from which he is purchasing breeding stock. Vaccines are available to be used when necessary and fairly quickly establish an adequate degree of immunity.

The disease is very variable. There may be only one pig in a herd affected or several pigs. The loss from

an outbreak can be quite substantial. Drug costs, loss of pigs, and general unthriftness of the ones that do survive all contribute to the losses.

The word erysipelas means 'red skin' but only describes one aspect of this very variable disease. The heart lesions, arthritis, and lameness of this infection continue to plague swine throughout the world. The fact that it is carried to survive in standing water, manure and other debris, make it a difficult disease to control once it is established in an area. Sanitation and all other well established principles of disease control will go a long way toward keeping the problem and the losses to a minimum.



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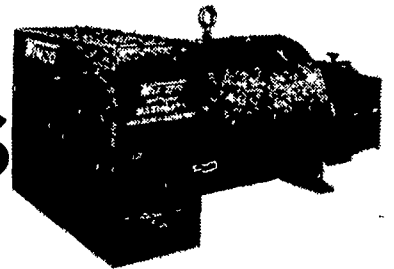
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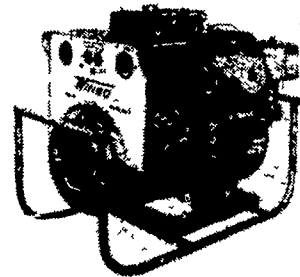
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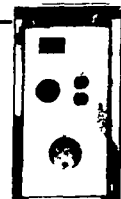
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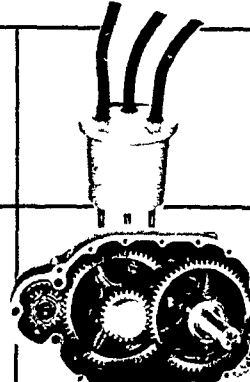
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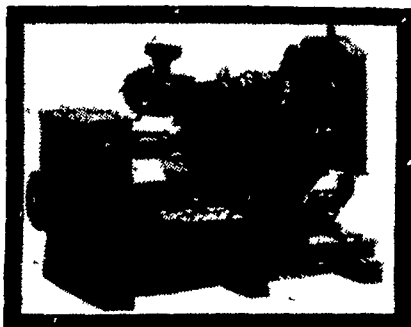
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