



Ask the VMD

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Sounds pregnant to me!
A reader asks:
 Could you tell me about the new method of sonar pregnancy checking sows? Are there any harmful side effects? Who is using this method and how is it available to the hog farmer?

Dr. Trayer comments:
 Sonar pregnancy checking of swine is a relatively new method of insuring that a sow is pregnant. It has been used to a limited degree in the past several years, but has recently gained in popularity for a number of reasons.

The drastic reduction in the cost of the equipment has encouraged the use of sonar checking of sows by hog farmers. Not only is the equipment less expensive, it is also built better to last longer.

In recent years, the accuracy of the test has been improved, giving farmers more reliable results.

And, probably the most important reason that sonar checks have become more common in the hog business is the higher cost of feed, which spells dollars to any farmer feeding open sows.

How does the sonar method work? A device that

looks like a small portable television makes up the largest part of the sonar machine. All told, it only weighs about ten pounds.

The box has a screen which produces a visual line of peaks. The way the peaks appear on the screen tells if the sow is pregnant.

Attached to the screen is a small transducer, about the size of a stethoscope. This transducer emits inaudible sound waves which are used to measure the amniotic fluid density of the sow.

The transducer is placed on the stomach of the sow and the sound waves are directed toward the middle of her back.

If the sow is pregnant, there is a difference in the time it takes the sound waves to bounce back from the sow. This difference shows up on the screen as a specifically located peak.

In a non-pregnant sow, there would be no amniotic fluid density, and therefore no delay.

The sonar tests are usually done between day 30 and 40 of the sow's gestation, and then again between day 60 and 70. Doing the test before 30 days or after 70 days results in less accuracy

because of the change in the quantity of amniotic fluids due to fetus size.

The reason for doing the test the second time, even after a positive test at 30 days, is because of the risk of reabsorption, abortion, or

false positives. With the second sonar check, a farmer can be 95 per cent sure the sow is pregnant.

There is no special equipment needed to perform the sonar pregnancy check, other than the machine itself. The test can be done in a regular stall; and if the sow is quiet, it can be done even while she is standing.

It has been found that on the average, ten per cent of the sows serviced do not conceive. Looking at the cost of feed per day running from 35 to 50 cents, a farmer can invest \$30 to \$40 on feed

before the sow is found to be open.

Based on these costs, a farmer who raises 300 litters per year could pay off a sonar pregnancy testing machine in about two years.

To date, I am not aware of any reports of bad side effects which would prove harmful to the sow or the litter because of using the sonar test.

This method is being used primarily by farmers with 100 sows or more in large farrowing operations. The equipment can be purchased from several national swine equipment manufacturers,

and may be available from local feed companies who provide this service for their customers.

Sonar pregnancy equipment is an added bonus that should become basic management tools for the large hog operations. It also has a place on the smaller hog farm when it is readily available from a local feed dealer, veterinarian, or neighboring farmer.

If you have a question you would like to have answered by the team of doctors at Valley Animal Hospital, send it to Ask the VMD, Box 386, Lititz, PA 17543.

Survey to update farm production costs

HARRISBURG — U.S. farmers spent \$114 billion to raise crops, poultry and livestock, a 14 percent jump from the \$100 billion outlay of 1977, according to estimates by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

State Agriculture Secretary Penrose Hallowell said enumerators from the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service will be contacting a cross-section of farmers during February and March in efforts to determine 1979 farm production costs.

Hallowell said the production expenditure information gathered in this survey is a key factor in determining net farm income, establishing the farmers' position in the

national and state economy, and computing other economic indexes.

All responses to the interviews will remain confidential. Only regional and national summaries will be published. Further information is available by calling Wally Evans at the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service at 717/787-3904.

Imagine This

If you are an average pickle eating American, you're going to eat nine pounds of pickles this year. It is estimated that 23 billion pickles will be consumed in this country during the coming year.



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