

# Program outlined to prevent swine tail biting

An eight-point program of good management can help prevent tail biting, a constant potential problem in today's swine operations. Tail biting tends to be somewhat seasonal, occurring most often when the poorest climate conditions prevail and when ventilation in confinement facilities is the poorest.

James D. Hedges, manager of swine research for the Wayne Feed Division of Allied Mills, Inc., recommends that producers take these eight preventive steps:

- Clip off the tails at birth.
- Start with clean facilities.
- Provide a balanced ration.
- Worm all pigs, whether on soil or not.
- Group pigs of the same

size together, allowing a minimum of eight square feet per pig at market weight.

Keep the sleeping area free of dampness and drafts.

Be sure the ventilation systems in confinement houses are working well and that the air at the floor level is not stale.

Watch closely for signs of nervousness, irritability, discomfort or actual chewing.

The symptoms, whether they include tail biting, ear chewing, fighting or just restlessness, usually stem from the following conditions:

- Subclinical disease problems; overcrowding in the pen; discomfort due to dampness or drafts; too

little feeder or water space per pig.

Also, slick or wet floors, so that pigs cannot move easily; stale air with high levels of ammonia and carbon dioxide gases; and poor nutrition due to improper mixing of concentrates or improper use of complete feeds.

The exact cause of tail biting is not known, Hedges explains. However, in many cases, it is an indication of bacterial buildup. The hogs may not be sick enough for a disease to be obvious to the producer. But there may be enough of a disease problem

to cause irritability and stress.

Stress can result in an electrolyte imbalance, Hedges says. The predominant electrolytes are sodium and potassium, and, to a lesser extent, chloride ions.

Thus, it's a combination of low grade infection, electrolyte imbalance, environmental changes and management practices that can lead to the tail biting problem. Once it occurs, Hedges recommends treating it in the following ways:

Use a high level of

medication in the feed.

Add an electrolyte mix of minerals and vitamins to the feed for two weeks.

Temporarily add 100 lb. of alfalfa per ton of feed.

Water medicate with a broad antibiotic.

Provide iron orally to give a different taste and to distract from tail biting.

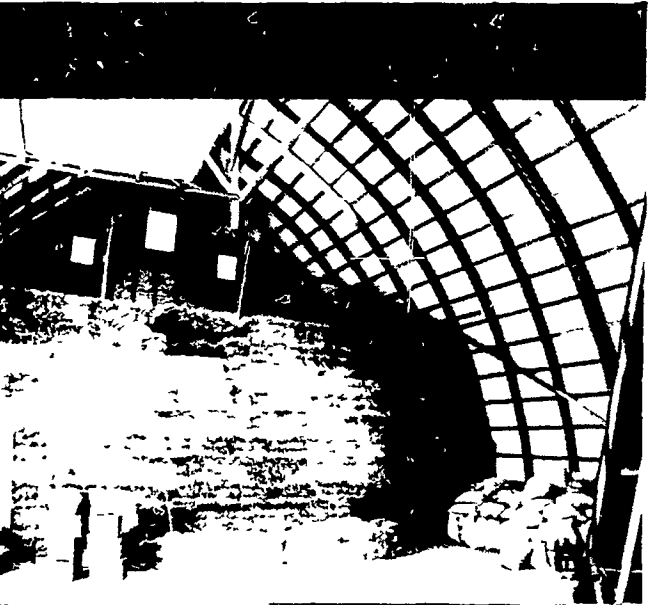
Watch for tail biters and separate them. Usually,

these are small gilts.

Treat the wounded areas on the pigs to prevent infection.

The high level of antibiotics will eliminate the potential bacteria problems, Hedges notes. The electrolyte mix and alfalfa will add potassium and help restore electrolyte balance. Alfalfa should also change the taste of the feed slightly.

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Read Futures Markets on Page 3.

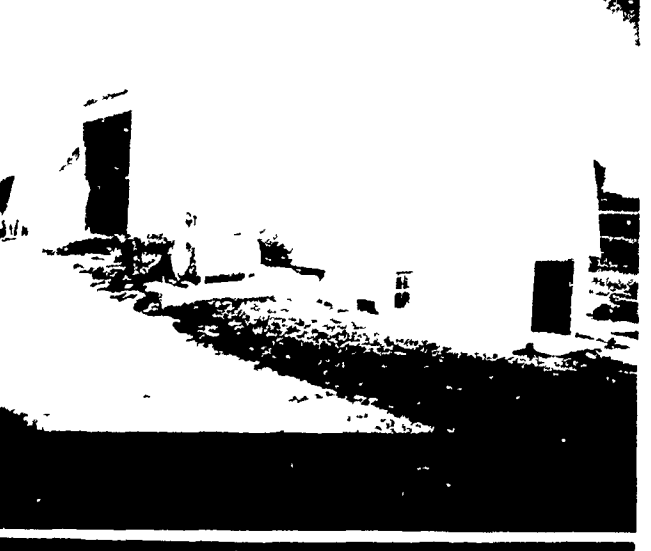


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