



Ask the VMD

Leon Riegel

Tim Trayer

Edgar Sheaffer

If you have a question you would like answered by the team from Valley Animal Hospital, send it to Ask the VMD, Box 366, Littitz, Pa. 17543. Questions will be kept anonymous on request.

Speaking of TB?

A reader writes:
Why doesn't anyone talk about the hidden problem of TB? It seems no one wants to talk about this problem except the meat inspectors. I had gotten two reports back on some of our hogs showing TB and so had the sow herd tested. With the showing of a few reactors, the decision was to depopulate completely and hopefully get started again after cleaning up. Now, I totally agree with the slap tattoo of market hogs, but why can the real culprits — the cull sows — get to market unidentified. Also, I find that brook stock can be moved Interstate without a TB test.

I foresee a problem when I ask a breeder to test a group of gilts for me before buying them.

It is apparent that TB has become a serious problem and after visiting with some USDA people, it seems the whole East Coast is in trouble.

I am trying to do my part in cleaning up and sure hope others do the same.

Robert M. McCarty
R4 Bloomsburg

Dr. Trayer comments:

The problem with tuberculosis in swine is that often the animals are asymptomatic carriers of TB.

There are two different

subspecies of the mycobacteria TB that swine can be exposed to: bovine and avian with avian being the most common.

The history associated with the avian form of TB is that the swine have some exposure to a contaminated premise that at one time had birds on it. This can be years in the past but somehow the soil remains contaminated with the mycobacterium.

Most often the reason TB in swine is not detected before slaughter is that it is not symptomatic. There are rarely any clinical signs that can be pinpointed as TB.

You may hear chronic coughing or see some weight loss, or diarrhea, or elevated temperatures, or maybe even some arthritis or mastitis in an older sow. In boars, you may see enlargement of the testicles. These are all clinical signs of tuberculosis, however, they are non-specific.

The question comes up — "Can we test for TB in swine?" Yes, we can test.

Using an avian derived product, we test by injecting one-tenth of a milliliter behind the animal's ear and come back in three days to see if the area is swollen. The only problem with this test is that it is not as refined as the test used for detecting TB in cattle.

As a result, there are a lot of false negatives showing up. Swine that had no reaction to the test here found to have TB after they were slaughtered and examined. The USDA veterinarian inspecting these false negatives finds the lymphnodes have TB—

like lesions. If these lesions occur in enough sites in the animal's body, the inspector will condemn the carcass resulting in a lower payment price to the producer.

For animals on slaughter as a result of TB, the USDA veterinarian can call for the meat to be cooked at 170 degrees Fahrenheit for 30 minutes. It can then be passed at the inspector's discretion.

Not only are there false negatives — there are also false positives. At times, the animal can be tested by the avian derived product, it can be injected, and there will be a positive reaction — a firm swelling that is indicative of TB. On sending this animal to market and slaughter, there are no lesions found.

So you can see that veterinarians do not have a reliable tool to identify carriers, previously exposed or presently exposed in acute phase.

The whole problem becomes quite a diagnostic challenge

I might point out that the testing product is supplied by the USDA's Animal Health Division, a proven product.

We basically recommend that producers do not raise swine on soil that has ever had poultry manure spread on it or any other exposure to domestic poultry. Poultry buildings are not recommended to be converted into swine barns at any time because the TB potential is always there.

Wild birds, which are generally not considered a problem in the spread of TB, have been found to carry the disease in certain instances.

They can contaminate your buildings or soil through their droppings if there is a large enough population.

A disinfectant that is effective against TB is cresolic acid, and can be used when cleaning down a swine barn.

How can you insure that breeding stock you purchase are clean? One method is the mycobacterium avian tuberculosis method.

Whenever I use the test, I counsel the producers on how inaccurate the test is but it is the only one we have to use.

It also would be wise to buy from a producer who has taken the time and the interest to have a slaughter check done, and who has a history of swine herds that are free of TB.

It is still felt that about 90 percent of all TB is

associated with the avian form. There are also mycobacteriums of soil origin and could be giving some cross-positive reactions with the avian test.

Another common area where TB turns up is in an operation where raw garbage is fed to swine. Any garbage that is to be fed should be cooked.

Any breeding stock going to the slaughter house must be identified with a market tag so it can be traced back to the farm of origin. This is a federal requirement for the purpose of identifying carriers and potential farm-of-origin disease processes.

Veterinarian Larry Hutchinson, of Penn State, (Turn to Page D8)

Franklin Co. DHIA

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