



# Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

The best way to protect this country's livestock industry from some of the world's serious plant and animal diseases is to stop those diseases from entering the country in any form.

The Department of Agriculture has an elaborate system of inspection at various ports of entry, and so far it's been pretty lucky. Several of the world's most damaging diseases have been kept out, but it's a never-ending battle as a recent outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease illustrates.

A few pet birds that somehow entered the country carrying that disease and the next thing you know there were confirmed infected birds in almost 20 states. Quick action and a little luck, and it looks as though the threat was contained. But there's always the next time.

Even though there's a quarantine system and all sorts of inspections, the threat looms quite large to the poultry industry.

Another potential threat is from African swine fever. Several close-by countries have it, including Cuba and Haiti, so animal health officials are always on the alert. They know that one infected animal or pork scrap from one of those countries could introduce it.

The problems that would cause are almost unmeasurable.

The Dominican Republic has had a serious swine fever problem and its government has opted for the ultimate solution — elimination of that small country's entire swine population. After fighting a futile battle for years, animal health officials in that country finally decided that the only way they could clean up the disease problem would be to get rid of all the pigs and start over.

That's exactly what's

happening. With the help of U.S. Department of Agriculture experts they've gotten rid of all of their hogs and now they're going to start over.

Pigs have always played a critical role in the lives of the Dominican people. Besides commercial production for domestic use and export, nearly every rural family keeps a few animals for daily use.

In the past almost every family had a pig or two in the back yard. They were allowed to run loose in the neighborhood, scrounging for food wherever they could find it...a most difficult environment when you consider a disease control program.

In the spring of 1978 Dominican pigs began dying from some mysterious disease. The problem was diagnosed mistakenly as hog cholera. An intense vaccination program followed, but it soon became evident that the vaccinated pigs were dying as quickly as non-vaccinated pigs. Only then did veterinarians properly diagnose the problem as African swine fever. But that was several months later and by then the disease had spread across the country.

Government officials considered many alternatives for eradicating the costly African swine fever, and finally decided that eliminating the entire swine population would be the least expensive procedure with the highest probability of success.

So the government made the decision, unique in the history of the Western hemisphere, to eliminate an entire domestic animal species and start fresh with new swine, free of African swine fever and many other bothersome diseases.

That decision forced the Dominican government not only to deal with the technical aspects of eradication but also with social implications and economic disruptions.

The eradication program started in August 1979 and by September 1980 there wasn't

a pig left in that country. Under the direction of the Dominican secretary of agriculture, more than 90 brigades of veterinarians, soldiers, field workers and animal health personnel, moved simultaneously from the west, north and east, rounding up and destroying every swine herd and every back yard pig.

Simultaneously the government launched a major public information effort to tell farmers that they would receive a fair price for their hogs. They were given the option of slaughtering them, on the spot, for family consumption or of being paid for them. Meat from hogs that have African swine fever is not harmful to humans who eat it, so human consumption provided a fairly useful technique in the eradication program.

Along with this effort the government started a poultry distribution program to help feed rural families during the time before disease-free pigs could be reintroduced. And it also supplied rural groups with information and demonstrations on how to care for poultry.

After a three-month waiting period to be sure the virus was completely destroyed, susceptible swine from the United States were introduced as sentinals to test whether the virus was still present. If these sentinals remain healthy for three months, the government will then begin restocking the country with disease-free pigs shipped from the United States.

That whole process will take at least another year, but then the country should

be completely free of African swine fever as well as many other costly and bothersome swine diseases.

Of course the threat will remain from outside its borders, so a strong vigil must be maintained as it is here in the United States where animal health officials operate a variety of inspection and surveillance activities. Not only must they stop infected animals and carcasses, but also any kind of swine fever contaminated food scraps or garbage from entering the country.

In both the Dominican Republic and Brazil, the original outbreaks of African

swine fever were traced back to food scraps that came off international airline flights.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture is

working with other countries of the Western hemisphere in an effort to help eradicate the African swine fever virus from the Western hemisphere. That would be the ultimate solution.

## State milk output up 5%

HARRISBURG — Milk production in Pennsylvania during October 1980 totaled 711 million pounds, up five percent from a year earlier, according to the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service.

The number of milk cows in the commonwealth during October was 718,000 head, up 15,000 head from a year ago.

Milk production per averaged 990 pounds in October, up 30 pounds from a year ago.

United States production during October totaled 10.5 billion pounds, three percent above October 1979. Milk production per cow averaged 960 pounds, 24 pounds more than a year earlier and 56 pounds above October 1978.

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