

How to save hogs from TGE

LITITZ— When the object of the game is to win, prior planning and good management of resources are two of the best possible moves. When dealing with transmissible gastroenteritis (TGE), those are just about the only moves possible.

"TGE is a killer," says Hal Sinclair, Manager of Technical Services at Diamond Laboratories, Inc. "It kills both pigs and profits. There simply is no effective treatment once a pig has been infected. Survival rate improves with the age of the pig, but mortality approaches 100 percent in baby pigs during the first seven to 10 days of life."

Prevention of the TGE virus available, prior planning and sound management become all-important in keeping the disease out of a swine herd.

"At a very minimum, three major areas should be considered when planning a comprehensive management program to win against TGE," suggests Sinclair.

"Basic to the program is understanding TGE and other diseases which may affect a herd. A part of that should include developing a good working relationship with the veterinarian who will be assisting should a problem arise," advises Sinclair.

That understanding and relationship will lay the groundwork for the other portions of the management program.

"The next two areas are critical," explains Sinclair. "A systematic approach must be taken to curtail movement of the TGE virus into an operation. To complement this effort, a routine program of immunization should also be adopted."

TGE is difficult to diagnose accurately unless a complete history of the animal is known or the virus has been isolated from infected pigs. Says Sinclair,

"It is usually only after the herd is experiencing severe death losses that the disease is recognized as anything other than a 'hot' case of scours.

"It's easy to mistake TGE for bacterial or dietary scours. Early consultation with a veterinarian will either confirm the worst or allow quick treatment of another problem."

The onset of TGE in very young pigs is usually rapid and characterized by vomiting, profuse watery diarrhea and dehydration. Sows may exhibit similar symptoms. Acutely infected sows may have recently farrowed and may also show additional signs of anorexia, slight fever and diminished or stopped milk flow. Feeder pigs may develop profuse watery diarrhea and lose weight.

Curtailling all movement of the TGE virus is virtually impossible, but there are a number of things which can be done to make entrance of the disease into an operation more difficult.

"When considering methods of keeping TGE out of a swine herd, approach the problem systematically," suggests Sinclair. "TGE can be spread at any time of the year, but it thrives during cold weather and extra attention during that time is well advised."

"Restricting access is basic to curtail movement of the virus into a herd. Birds, dogs, rodents and other animals are known carriers of the virus. Controlling their access to swine feeding areas and other facilities is a major consideration.

"Likewise," continues Sinclair, "anyone entering a hog operation should be considered suspect and a possible transporter of the virus. TGE can be introduced on hands, feet, clothing, even by a cough; so the best rule to follow, is one of exclusion of everyone

except essential personnel. Rigorous sanitation procedures should be developed at each operation and followed completely by anyone entering swine facilities."

But, keep in mind that the TGE virus is extremely contagious, and even the very best management practices can't always stop it.

To complement efforts to curtail movement of the TGE virus, many pork producers have made a TGE immunization program part of their management routine. Many producers consider vaccinating pregnant sows with a vaccine like TGE-Vac C to be inexpensive insurance.

"An ongoing immunization program is essential," says Sinclair. "Even hogs that have once had TGE are not always immune to the disease."

Likening the disease to a head cold in its ability to develop immunity, Sinclair notes, "TGE is localized to a particular part of the body—the gut—and because of the localized nature, it creates only temporary immunity. Systemic diseases which run through the entire body, on the other hand, allow the body to develop longer immunity."

Vaccinating each sow prior to farrowing costs less than 60 cents per baby pig from an average-sized litter. "That's a small price to pay to prevent diseases that can cause loss of an entire pig crop," Sinclair says.

The vaccine offers the advantages of positive dose accuracy, says Sinclair. "It is administered through two intramuscular injections given at one month intervals, with the second injection recommended from seven to 30 days to farrowing."

This assures that the sow is getting the proper vaccine dosage, and sows don't have to be taken off feed or

vaccines mixed with special feed or milk."


Once the sow is immunized, that immunization is passed on to suckling pigs through the sow's milk. "But it is important to remember," cautions Sinclair, "that this immunity is only

temporary and a regular pre-farrowing immunization program should be incorporated into any management plan.

"In major hog producing areas, winter death losses of baby pigs to TGE run two to four percent. The only real

solution for trimming the resulting \$4 million to \$5 million yearly loss is prior planning and sound management, achieved through understanding the disease, thwarting its movement and immunizing against it," Sinclair concludes.

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