



**Ask the  
VMD**

Leon Riegel





Dr. Maas    Tim Trayer    Edgar Sheaffer

**A reader asks:**  
I recently learned of a practice of feeding manure from the pig nursery to gestating sows. This practice was supposed to build immunity in future litters. Do you recommend this practice? Are there any drawbacks?  
**Dr. Trayer comments:**  
I personally cannot think of a valid reason of feeding fecal material from pigs' nursery to

gestating sows.  
My definition of nursery is a group of pigs weaned from the sow, ranging in weight from 15 pounds to 40 or 50 pounds.  
The practice of feeding manure from the pig nurseries to the gestating sows would not develop any different immunity than that which the young pigs have already been exposed to. And when the weaned sows are returned to the

gestating areas, they too would be exposing the gestating sows to anything the young pigs would have carried into the nursery.  
It has been recommended in the past to practice feeding fecal material from the farrowing room to the gestating sows or to new gilts brought into the operation when disease is a problem.  
The practice of exposing the next farrowing group to farrowing room

bacteria or viruses is recommended only if the operation is not an all-in, all-out farrowing, where the farrowing room is completely disinfected and fumigated. In a continual farrowing process, which doesn't allow substantial clean-up, there will be a bacteria and virus build up specific for the farrowing room.  
Gestating sows should be brought in and exposed to these 'new' viruses and bacteria in the farrowing room a week to ten days before farrowing. By eating the fecal material, they will be building an immunity for future litters.

I don't advocate this method of continuous farrowing. But if it is what the producer is involved in, this is the only situation where feeding manure from previous farrowing groups may help reduce disease. It is only a matter of time, however, until there is such a high level of bacterial growth that increased farrowing problems - sows off feed, lack of milk, abnormal vaginal and uterine discharges, increased death and illness in baby pigs - will be experienced. This is, of course, an unsatisfactory situation.

Feeding manure from the farrowing room to the rest of the breeding stock also was practiced in the past when there was an outbreak of TGE, transmissible gastro enteritis. This disease process has a mortality approaching 100 percent of all pigs less than two weeks of age. And basically all stock on the farm, when exposed to the virus, get sick. The primary symptom is vomiting.  
The idea behind feeding manure when TGE was suspected was to build up immunity to the disease. The best way of building immunity it was discovered was to grind up intestinal tracts of baby pigs and

feed them to the rest of the breeding stock.  
I repeat, this was practiced in the past. Now that we understand the disease process better, we realize the safer, more effective method of instilling immunity is to incorporate a vaccination program. This has become available within the past year under federal license.  
The vaccination product uses two doses of oral vaccine, followed by one intramuscular vaccination of the sow. The whole idea is to develop a gut level and blood level of immunity. This has proven effective and much better than previous vaccination programs on TGE.

In the past, feeding programs involving the live, active virus, actually prolonged the disease. A chronic TGE problem, which is difficult to identify, then breaks out in continual farrowing operations. It may only present itself as a single litter loss in a group of farrowings and becomes a diagnostic challenge.  
Several drawbacks of feeding from the pig nurseries back to the gestating sows follow:  
There is extra work created for the producer who decides to carry the manure.  
If the nurseries are experiencing illnesses, such as intestinal bacterial infection or dysentery, this would be transferred into breeding stock and could create multiple problems - abortions, etc. It is not uncommon for breeding stock, once exposed to these diseases, to become chronically infected. The sows infect their young and don't pass along an effective immunity without showing clinical signs of infection themselves.  
Overall, I would not recommend this practice unless there is something specifically indicated on the farm.

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