

Newly purchased feeder pigs need special care

NEWARK, DE — Load a pig on a truck with 30 or 40 of his buddies and send him down the road. Put him in a sale barn. Deprive him of feed and water. Put him back on a truck...with even more pigs, but from a different farm. Then put him in a strong environment with still more pigs, and expect him to perform.

"Anybody buying or selling feeder pigs is aware of feeder pig stress and has to deal with it on a regular basis," says University of Delaware extension livestock specialist Dr. Ken Kephart. Researchers at several Midwestern universities have been taking a hard look at this problem, he says.

A summary of results from these studies was published recently by the National Pork Producers Council. Kephart has highlighted some of the findings for the benefits of area pork producers.

Transport and Fasting. The detrimental effects of transport appear to be temporary, the specialist says. Studies at both Missouri and Purdue indicate that transporting pigs and keeping them off feed and water affect performance for only the first few weeks. In one Missouri study, pigs were shipped to a simulated market and handled in one of three

ways: 1. no feed or water, 2. water only, or 3. water and feed.

Pigs that stayed home had similar growth rates and feed efficiencies to those undergoing simulated marketing conditions. The pigs tolerated the shipping and handling better than expected. But in these experiments, they may not have been exposed to all the diseases for which auction barns are notorious, he says.

Source of Pigs. Scientists at Nebraska conclude that equal performance can be expected from either local pigs from one owner or pigs from distant markets from several owners. But they point out that pigs from distant markets require more health treatments and have higher death losses.

Disease. The major health problems affecting feeder pigs are respiratory distress and diarrhea, says Kephart. A 1972 survey of midwestern buyers found that 85 percent of them had death losses of 4 percent or less.

Feeder Pig Shrinkage. Total shrinkage varies. Some feeder pig buyers report live weight shrinkage of 15 percent during

transport, while some researchers contend it may be as little as 5.5 percent, the specialist says. Providing feed and water to the pig during his stay at the market terminal was of little value in many studies for reducing transport shrinkage. And it appears that the weight loss encountered during the marketing process is generally regained by the third day.

Receiving Diets. What is the right protein level? Should oats be included in the ration? Should antibiotics be fed and at what level? Should they be in the water or feed?

Many researchers and farmers feel that because the newly purchased pig consumes less feed than normal, he should be on a high protein diet, Kephart says. But there are probably just as many people in the industry suggesting that a low protein diet is best.

"The fact is that we don't know how much protein a ration should contain for newly purchased pigs until more research has been conducted," he says.

A common practice for

preventing scours is to increase the dietary fiber—generally through the addition of oats. Researchers at Nebraska and Missouri have conducted six studies in the past three years to determine if extra fiber is of any benefit for the control of diarrhea. Based on these studies it appears that added fiber usually will delay the onset of diarrhea and in some cases decrease its severity, the specialist says.

Nebraska researchers recommend limit feeding on the floor twice a day for the first 7 to 10 days to reduce the incidence of diarrhea. An obvious advantage of this practice is the increased daily observation, which enables prompt treatment of sick pigs, he says.

Most studies indicate a benefit from antimicrobial feed additives. "The degree of response varies, but pigs on antibiotics generally scour less, grow more efficiently, and at a faster rate," says Kephart. "Using a broad spectrum product is a logical approach, but

it's not clear how long we should feed the antibiotic or at what level."

Most people agree that a pig under stress will drink before it will eat. "It follows that we should add antibiotics to the water, with or in place of those in the feed," he says. "Data regarding water medication are limited but antibiotics appear to be more effective in the water."

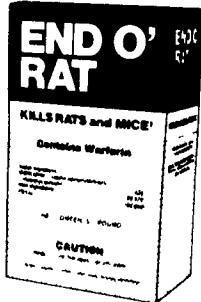
To summarize, the effects of transportation and processing of feeder pigs may not be as harmful as once thought, says Kephart. But these stresses in combination with disease exposure may lead to more problems than some of the university studies show. And more questions need to be answered in regard to protein, fiber and antibiotics.

"While we wait for the answers, remember that common sense goes a long way," he concludes. "Avoid overcrowded trucks. Keep the pigs comfortable during weather extremes. And leave the whip in your hip pocket."

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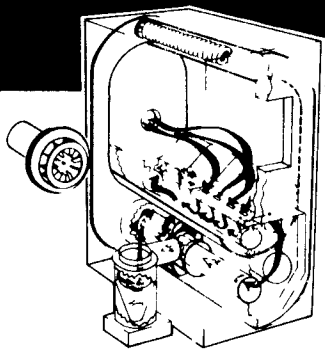


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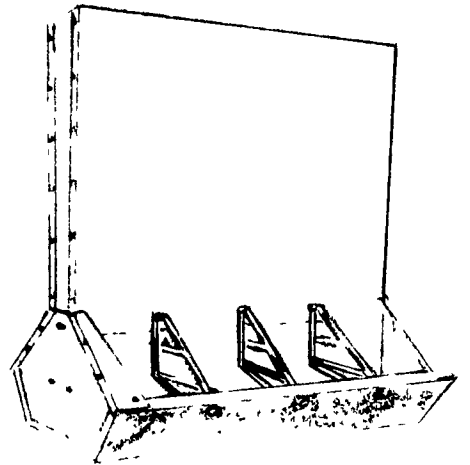
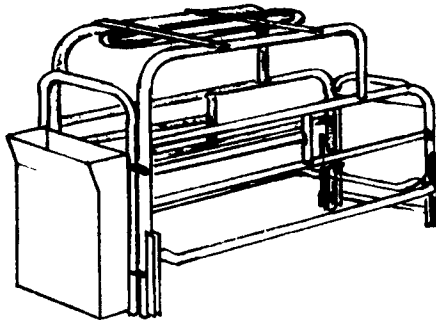
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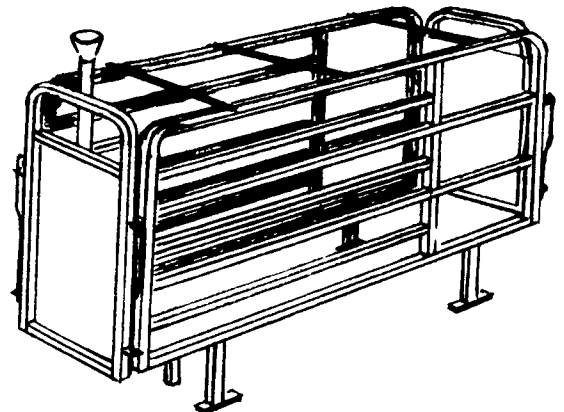
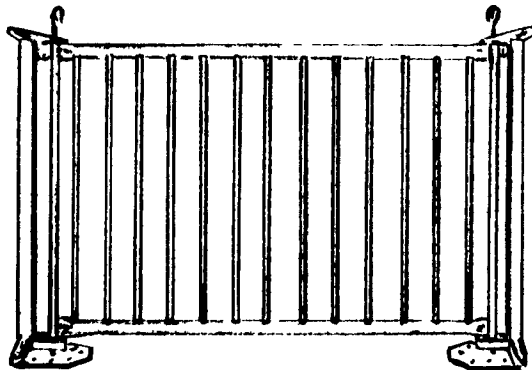
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