

Pay Extra Attention To Swine During Winter

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Because winter weather can increase the likelihood of several hog health problems, swine producers need to keep their animals warm and well, said an expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Respiratory problems, viral infections, and feed inefficiency are just a few of the concerns producers should be aware of during winter," said Dr. Kenneth Kephart, associate professor of animal science. "Keeping a careful eye on your animals will help them stay healthy and help keep your operation profitable."

Avoiding swine respiratory problems can be a major challenge for producers during winter, particularly when pigs are housed indoors. Poor air movement in confined spaces can cause or aggravate ailments such as chronic pneumonia and rhinitis.

"During winter, producers tend not to move much air through their facilities," Kephart said. "They slow ventilation fans down to retain warmth and minimize heating bills. But when air quality suffers the pigs suffer, too. The object is to find a happy medium between moving enough air and not using

too much heat."

Observation will tell you if too little air is moving through your facility. "If you're moving a lot of air and the pigs are huddled together, they're too cold," Kephart said. "On the other hand, if your eyes water when you walk in, there's too much ammonia in the air — and not enough fresh air."

Sweating walls also can reveal inadequate ventilation. "If you see an insulated wall sweating, it's an excellent sign you're not moving enough air," Kephart said. "It's natural for windows to sweat, but not for insulated walls or ceilings."

The risk of viral infections also increases during winter. "Viruses survive better in cold temperatures, so producers must be extremely vigilant about biosecurity," Kephart said. "During the winter months, your chances of spreading transmissible gastroenteritis, pseudorabies, and other viral diseases increases."

"When you go to a packing plant or marketing area, wear disposable overalls and boots, or make sure you launder that clothing before entering your own facility," he said. "You'll be in contact with pigs from many different places,

and you must assume that every possible disease will be there. Don't wear any clothing you've worn into a packing plant or marketing area into your barns unless they've been laundered."

If your herd stays outside, be sure to keep them as warm as possible or their feed efficiency will be severely inhibited. "When pigs are outside in cold weather, they need more feed than normal because they burn more energy just to keep warm," Kephart said. "The amount of feed a pig needs to stay in good flesh doesn't have to get out of hand unless you're not using enough bedding and the pigs aren't warm enough when they sleep."

Winter is an ideal time to feed a high-fiber diet. "When an animal digests fiber, the digestion process generates heat," Kephart said. Providing plenty of bedding material also will help, as will building a hovel. "If the weather is extremely cold, consider building an area to trap heat down at the pig's level," Kephart said. Place straw bales on planks or plywood, creating a miniature environment that will keep the pigs warmer.

Normal feed conversion is roughly three pounds of feed to

each pound of gain, Kephart said. "But when pigs are so cold they shiver, the feed conversion rate triples — it takes nearly 10 pounds of feed for each pound of gain. You can't make money under those conditions, no matter how strong the market is."

Observing the outside facility when the pigs are sleeping can reveal whether your animals are

too cold. "Watch the pigs as they sleep," Kephart said. "If they're spread out on their sides and quiet, they're comfortable. But if they're fussing and fighting with each other for a place to sleep, and if pigs are crawling on top of each other and piling up, they're far too cold, which means they're burning up a lot of feed."



Another view of the three grassed paddocks and sacrifice lot, left, at the Roudabush farm. The rotational lot management system was observed on two dairy farms in the central Shenandoah Valley of Virginia during a recent Pequea-Mill Creek Project tour.

Mill Creek Project

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Harold Roller, ag extension agent in Rockingham County, Virginia, explained the Rockingham County poultry manure ordinance. The ordinance outlined minimum setbacks, acreage requirements, and nutrient management requirements for new and existing poultry facilities.

Farmers in the Pequea-Mill Creek area of central Lancaster county who may be interested in trying the rotational lot management system can contact Jeff Stoltzfus or Frank Lucas at the Pequea-Mill Creek Project, 311B Airport Dr., P. O. Box 211, Smoketown, PA 17576-0211, (717) 396-9423.

Indiana Senator Urges Quick Action

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar urged USDA officials to expedite disaster payments to farmers hurt by drought this year, proposing that the two month sign-up period for disaster relief — possibly commencing as late as February 1992 — be shortened to one month.

Lugar from Indiana proposed a shorter sign-up period to speed disaster assistance payments to farmers.

"We ought to get 1991 disaster payments out to eligible farmers as fast as we possibly can, consistent with running a sound program," Lugar said in a letter to USDA Secretary Ed Madigan.

"It seems to me that one month might be sufficient for collecting (disaster assistance) applications. This way, farmers could receive payments a month sooner than would otherwise be the case."

"I understand that there is some minimum amount of time required to implement the disaster payment program if it is to be done in a responsible manner. But I cannot stress enough my own view that we ought to minimize the waiting time for farmers," Lugar said.

The Congress passed and President Bush signed into law a \$1 billion drought disaster package to help those farmers who lost more than 35 percent of a crop this summer, according to Lugar, who proposed the assistance in September.

Payments will be made based on the extent of damage to a crop. Farmers with crop insurance would qualify for payments on losses above a threshold deductible of 35 percent of the average yield. Those without insurance would qualify if they lost more than 40 percent of a crop.

For example, an insured corn farmer would receive \$1.13 for every bushel lost to drought above 35 percent of his expected crop, which is based on historical averages for yield in the county.

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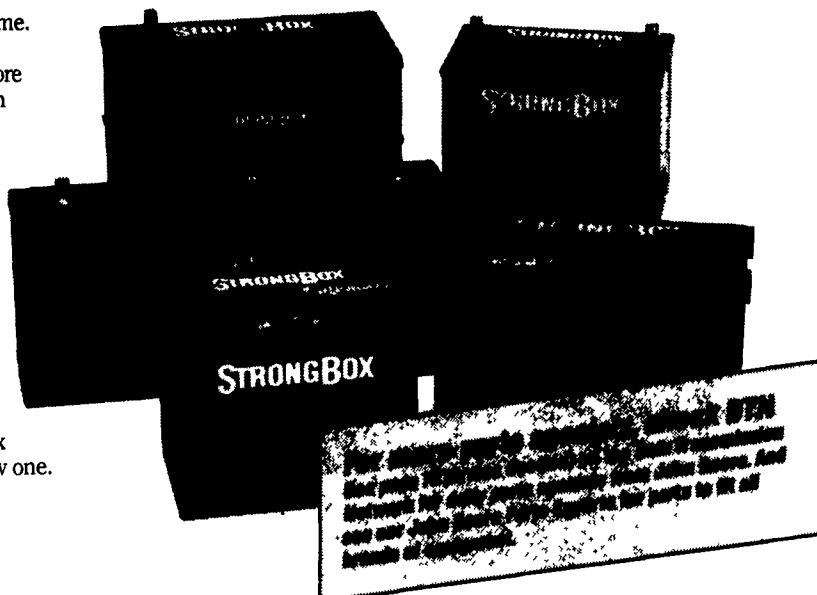
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